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THE RIGHT SORT
MRS EDWARD KENNARD



THE RIGHT SORT ;

OR,

A ROMANCE OF THE SHIRES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. EDWARD KENNARD.

"There are men both good and wise, who hold that in a future state
Dumb creatures we have cherished here below
Shall give us joyous greeting when we pass the golden gate ;"
Is it folly, that I hope it may be so ?

VOL. III.

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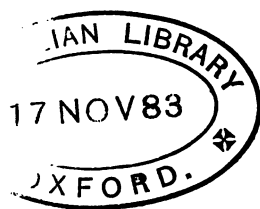
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THE RIGHT SORT.

CHAPTER I.

IF pleasant moments pass away on this earth all too quickly, there remains at least a counterbalancing advantage in the equal passage of unpleasant ones. Oft-abused time possesses the virtue of strict impartiality. His inexorable hand moves on, alike indifferent to pleasure and to pain, softening and equalizing each in turn, as it sweeps over them. Were it not so, the human mind must give way under the strain far oftener than it does, for if our sufferings always retained their acuteness, if with the lapse of days and months and years, their fresh edge did not gradually become blunted, then life indeed would be unendurable. But a merciful Providence has ordained otherwise, in the majority of cases, and time soothes our wounds as he dulls our joys. So by degrees

the incidents recorded in the last chapter faded gently from men's minds, until at length they ceased to occupy any prominent position therein, and harmony was once more restored. Other topics of conversation arose to banish the old, for oftentimes the more eagerly a subject is discussed, the more liable is it to speedy exhaustion.

Miss Palliser began slowly to creep, not into favour, for that was impossible, but into passive toleration, as a nuisance to be endured in silence, as one endures the chafing of a saddle, the bite of a small irritating but nameless insect.

The month of December was ushered in with cold, white, sea fogs, which wreathed all the country in sullen mists, moistening the naked branches of the stripped trees, and the pointed spikes of the blackthorn in the hedgerows. Rain also descended in torrents and once or twice the hounds had had to be taken home in the middle of the day, owing to the impossibility of following them through the heavy fog. The sodden leaves lay in heaps upon the saturated ground, while ditches began to open out, and to reveal *hitherto* unseen, though not altogether un-

suspected depths. The roads were ankle deep in rich brown mud, and the brooks and rivers in the neighbourhood came swirling down charged with all sorts of refuse, in such rapid torrents, that in many cases they broke through their banks and flooded all the meadows and low-lying ground, so that acres upon acres of water met the eye in every direction. Hunting people grumbled, left all considerations of personal appearance at home, arrayed themselves in covert coats, comforters, pot hats, and nondescript waterproof garments of every shape and size prior to splashing through the treacherous element, and resisting a further downfall, while many of the less enthusiastic and more luxurious, either hurried up to the Metropolis under pretence of witnessing the last new piece at the Gaiety, or stayed at home reading French novels of a spicy nature, and smoking long cherry-wood pipes, declaring hunting under such circumstances was not "good enough," and reiterating with more force than originality the well-known saying about the folly of making "a toil of your pleasures." Farmers shook their heads dolefully, all outdoor labour having come to a

standstill, talked in a dismally prophetic strain of the weather and their future prospects, declaring with customary and annual forebodings, "times were shocking bad, and the country was going fast to the dogs," though with all due respect to these worthy agricultural authorities, it certainly looked more like being given over to the fishes than to any dry-footed animal.

The declining days of the old year were speeding away in damp and in misery. It seemed as if the sky wept out of sympathy for the loss of an ancient friend, and the sun hid his bright face among the lowering clouds, and refused to give forth a single ray of sunshine by way of comfort. Nothing more dreary and desolate could possibly have been imagined. Yet through it all hunting struggled on, and horses also, while the wet state of the ground apparently gave rise to a marvellous scent, and such runs were recorded as but very few of the whole large field ever managed to see the end of, for the steeds sobbed and laboured through the deluged pastures, sending the water squelching up each time it rose above their fetlock

joints, and none but the very stoutest, strongest animals, a stone or two beyond their rider's weight, could hope to live through many hours of such work. Some broke down hopelessly, some banged their joints and hit their legs, whilst others again lost flesh, refused to eat, and looked like living scarecrows. To those who owned cattle not quite up to the mark, it was doubly provoking to witness from a distance, becoming with each mile more and more enforced, many a truly first-class run. The wise sportsman was he who dissembled and shielded the failing powers of his gee from universal discovery. An excuse was easily found, a lost shoe, a train to catch, or telegram to send off, were sufficient to cover a timely retreat. But this wet weather, greatly as it was disliked by the majority, suited the Duckling exactly. Hounds were unable to travel quite so fast as on the top of the ground, and he could stay all day. He literally revelled in dirt, and galloped through it like a steam engine. After an unusually fine hunting run, in which he had covered himself with glory, Kate Brewser, wet to the skin,

but greatly elated in spirit, found herself riding in the direction of Foxington, with Colonel Clinker as her companion.

Of late they had often ridden home together, and it had now become quite a recognised thing that they should do so, while during the many miles they had paced side by side conversation flourished apace, and they had indulged in a promiscuous interchange of ideas, which had placed them on a very confidential and intimate footing. These two young people suited each other, and found in many respects their tastes, ideas and inclinations were very similar. Kate was wont to discourse to her companion in a lofty strain, which although he invariably laughed at at the time, vowing her suggestions to be too highly pitched, he often ultimately acquiesced in, whilst she learnt daily to recognise more and more the inherent goodness and kindness of his disposition, and to look up to it and lean upon it with a perfect trust, which a far greater amount of talent might possibly have failed to inspire.

"I'm always asking favours of you, Miss Brewser," said Colonel Clinker as they subsided into a walk, after a long, steady jog,

during which neither of them had uttered more than an occasional fragmentary exclamation. "I want you to do me one now."

"I should say it was the other way about," returned Kate, ducking her head so as to allow a small stream of water to escape from the brim of her pot hat. "What is it? Nothing very terrible I hope?"

"Oh, no! not at all. But I want you to come to Sandown next week. The races are on Thursday and Friday. You told me once 'that one good turn deserves another.' Well, I helped you through *your* steeplechase in a sort of way—at least, you were kind enough to say so—and now I want you to help me through mine."

"How do you mean through yours? You never mentioned it before?"

"No, because I feel ashamed of bothering you with all my little private affairs. Good-natured as you are in listening to them, I can't believe they possess any special interest," looking at her curiously.

"Are *you* going to ride?" she asked with a sudden flush mounting to her fresh, damp cheeks, such as even their long trot had not given birth to.

“Yes.”

“And you want *me* to come and look on?”
She put the question in a subdued voice, for her heart was beating fast at the mere thought.

“Would you think it very conceited if I said that I did?”

She turned her head away without answering.

“Will you come?” he said persuasively, not realising that anything in her power to grant she would grant him, for true love renders people curiously modest, and distrustful of their own power to please.

“Yes, if I can.” She spoke very softly, but something in the manner of uttering the words seemed to please him, for his face brightened instantaneously.

“That’s all right,” he said heartily. “So now I’ll tell you all about it. You must know I expect to have a pretty busy time at Sandown, for I have promised to ride horses belonging to at least half-a-dozen different fellows, besides which I intend running dear old Snowflake in the United Hunters’ Steeplechase. The entries this year are decidedly poor, but the race itself is worth close upon

five hundred, so that I have pretty well made up my mind to have a shy at it. Snowflake, too, was never better in his life, and the heavy going is all in his favour. It suits him. He and the Duckling are just a pair in that respect. Snowflake is an awfully sound-winded horse, exactly the sort to make light of a hill to finish against, and I can't help thinking he possesses an uncommonly fair chance of winning. You won't grudge giving up a couple of days' hunting for once in a way, in order to see Snowflake distinguish himself, will you?"

"Yes I shall, tremendously," she said with a smile which effectually succeeded in contradicting the assertion. "If I hear when I came back, that they have had a good run, I shall be as savage as a bear."

"Well, so shall I for the matter of that, though it's always one's luck. However," speaking in tones of confident cheeriness, "we will have an awfully jolly time of it. We will all run up to town together on Wednesday evening after hunting"—

"Who's all?" interrupted she mischievously.

"Oh! you and I—and—and Miss Whit-

bred I suppose, Mr. Grahame and Terry. By-the-bye, has it ever struck you that those two young people rather fancy each other?"

"Which two young people?" feigning complete ignorance.

"Why Miss Whitbread and the Chirper, of course."

"Dear me! Fancy your only having just found that out! Men *are* dull."

"Then you admit to having noticed a flirtation in this direction?"

"I don't know. Mary never flirts in the true acceptation of the term, she is romantic and fancies herself in love instead."

"And you—what do you do? Is your nature a similar one?"

"Don't be so silly," giving the Duckling's rotund sides a little impatient kick with the heel. "How else are we to amuse ourselves when we go up to town?"

"Why, we'll go to a theatre together on the first night, races again the following day, and catch the eight o'clock special back, which will land us safe and sound at Foxington somewhere about ten thirty p.m. What do you say to the programme? Does it please your majesty?"

"Very much indeed. If only it can be carried out."

"Why do you say *if*? There are no insuperable difficulties to be overcome?"

"Insuperable, no, difficulties, yes. To begin with, nice things never *do* come off according to our anticipations, and secondly, I doubt very much if Mary, who is so strong on the proprieties, will consider you and Mr. McGrath sufficient chaperones for two young ladies at a public theatre."

"Oh, bother the chaperone! Can't you raise a placid old female somewhere?"

"What a disrespectful way of talking," exclaimed Kate with a laugh.

"Do you mean to say the whole thing is to be knocked on the head for such nonsense?"

"I didn't say that, anyhow I promise to talk the matter over with Mary when I get home, and see how best the outing can be managed. You know," playfully, "I don't dare do anything without consulting Mary Whitbread. She prevents my tumbling into no end of scrapes."

"Tell Miss Whitbread from me, that Mr. Grahame says *he* will go if *she* does."

"Now that's nasty of you, trying to gain a mean advantage, and I shan't tell her any such thing."

"'Pon my soul, I believe the Chirper's most awfully spooney. I do indeed, Miss Brewser, and it would be only charitable to give the young people a chance. The Chirper is not half a bad fellow."

"Since when, may I ask, have you developed these match-making propensities?"

"Oh! I don't know, not very long. This winter I think."

"Then if the habit be so recently acquired as all that, you will not probably find much difficulty in discontinuing it," said Kate, with a mischievous spirit upon her. "I *hate* match-making. No good ever comes of it." She was thinking of that melancholy attempt at match-making of her Uncle Campbell's. Presently she added after a slight pause. "If Mr. Grahame *really* cares for Mary, as you say, he is free to speak to her of his own accord, and interference from a third party is as unnecessary as it is injudicious."

Now when a man makes a suggestion, even in fun, and finds that suggestion accepted with serious disfavour, he is apt to draw in

his horns like a sensitive snail, and feel rather small. Colonel Clinker cleared his throat once or twice, and said testily.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Brewser. I’m sorry I spoke. I presume you will give up all idea of going to Sandown then?”

He sat quite straight up in the saddle, and looked steadily out before him at the driving rain. It was clear to his mind she had no wish to go, and therefore she should not see that he cared one way or the other. It had been a silly fancy on his part, not wholly free from vanity, desiring she should witness Snowflake’s success. His victory was evidently a matter of indifference to Miss Brewser. After all it was but natural, and least said soonest mended. So Jack Clinker argued to himself in his quickly aroused pride. But Kate, half guessing from whence his sudden silence derived its source, said airily :

“You are very ready in your surmises, Colonel Clinker, in fact almost amusingly so, but for once they fail to be distinguished by their usual accuracy. I have *not* given up the idea of going to Sandown at all, on the contrary directly I get home I mean to ask Mary to write to an aunt of hers, living in

town, a Mrs. Tryon, and beg her to put us up for a couple of nights, so there ! ”

She uttered the last words in a little mocking tone, which nevertheless restored him to complete good humour. He could not feel angry with her for long, though she had a malicious way of taking up his speeches, and turning and twisting them, which was decidedly irritating at times, especially to a man grown extra sensitive from a love he had not yet dared to avow. But now all was once more right between them.

“ I see you are bent on the chaperone,” he said gaily. “ You won’t believe what a capital hand I am at looking after young ladies.”

“ I can quite believe that if you are not so, it is from no lack of experience,” retorted Kate vivaciously. “ Nevertheless, without wishing to place any slur upon your capacity, I think I shall feel more secure under the wing of a fat, good-natured, middle-aged lady, like Mrs. Tryon.”

“ Oh ! if she’s fat and good-natured I’ll forgive her for being a duenna. It’s the lean energetic ones I dislike, who are like parched peas in a tin pot, and whose restless, piercing eyes seem to look you through and through.”

"If you were an immaculate young man, you ought not to object to the process."

"But I'm *not* an *immaculate young man*, and therefore I do. A constant espionage over one, is enough to make the best conducted individual in this world break loose now and again."

"And yet," said Kate sympathetically, "one can't help feeling sorry for the poor things. All the odium falls to their share, and but little of the enjoyment. It must be wearisome work sitting all night long and never dancing a step, with only supper, like a single oasis in the desert, to support and cheer the fainting spirit. But tell me, how long is it since you decided on running Snowflake?"

"Only since the appearance of the weights. He's well in for an aged horse, carries ten stone six, but then very few people except myself know how good he is."

"I wonder you have never raced him before."

"I have in out of the way country places; the fact of the matter is, however, he is such a magnificent hunter I never could bring myself to lose his services for any length of time."

“And if it is not an impertinent question, what has reconciled you to doing so now?”

“Don’t you remember my telling you the race was worth a monkey? That sum, Miss Brewser,” looking unusually grave, “is not to be despised, especially when a fellow is so awfully hard up as myself. I don’t mind owing to you, that it will be a very serious matter indeed for me if the old horse does not pull through next week, for I shall scarcely know which way to turn for that valuable commodity R.M.D. I’ve got ten to one against Snowflake, and I’ve backed him altogether to win close upon two thousand pounds. If the coup only comes off I shall be in clover, but if it don’t—well I really hardly know what on earth possesses me to give you this detailed account of my financial difficulties—I shall in all probability have to make a bolt of it.”

“A bolt of it?” echoed Kate, failing to understand his meaning.

“Yes, go away somewhere for a bit to give one’s creditors the slip. Disappear from society, and reside for a space in a retired French watering town.” He spoke with an assumed levity which but badly hid an under-

lying current of anxiety contained in his words,

"Oh! how dreadful!" exclaimed Kate, thoroughly distressed at this prospect.

"Do you think so?" he said with a forced smile. "Plenty of people make occasional continental tours, and return after a lengthened period thoroughly white-washed. Perhaps the operation might do me good and wipe away the stains of accumulated years."

"I wish you would not talk like that, even in fun. I can't bear it."

"I wish it were fun," he answered moodily, "but it's sober earnest, Miss Brewser," with a sudden fit of candour, feeling he should like her to learn the worst; "you do not know what a bad fellow I am, a regular spendthrift."

"You may be a spendthrift, but you are not bad. I won't allow you to call yourself by such hard names in my presence."

"I'm awfully worried," continued he, finding once he had commenced, confession seemed easier than he had expected. "Only this very morning the forage dealer sent in a

bill for three hundred pounds, and actually had the impertinence to declare he must be paid within a week."

"You should not call it impertinence," said she in tones of grave reprimand. "The man has a right to claim his own, and I daresay has already displayed considerable forbearance."

"But what am I to do? I *can't* pay him. It's utterly impossible till something turns up. He ought to have sense enough to know that."

"You can sell one or two of your horses surely. Opal would fetch a lot of money, perhaps enough to pay the whole debt."

"Opal!" opening his eyes indignantly. "Why, I would not sell her if I were as poor as a church mouse and had not fifty pounds at the bank."

"You are wrong, you ought to," she said decidedly.

According to her innocent ideas she could not conceive a man, and a gentleman, leading a luxurious life and satisfying every want, yet unable to meet his legitimate engagements. Her notions about such things were exceedingly strict. She had derived most of

them from her Uncle Campbell, in the olden days. Colonel Clinker meantime was gnawing viciously at the ends of his fair moustache.

"Do you object to my plain speaking?" she asked gently. "Of course I know I have no right to advise or interfere."

It was on the tip of his tongue to say, "I wish to God you had," but he refrained, and contented himself with a simple but somewhat moody "No."

"People should not incur debts they cannot afford to defray," continued the girl. "It's almost as bad as cheating. Don't you see how mean an action it is to make some poor man, who probably cannot afford to lose half so well as you yourself, pay for enjoyments which common honesty would abjure? I am sure you would think so too, if you would only consider the matter a little."

There was a simplicity, a freshness, an earnestness about her reproof, which touched him to the quick.

"I told you I was a bad fellow," he repeated in depreciatory self-abasement.

"And I," said she with decision, "tell you that you are *not* bad, only careless, and perhaps a little *too* much given to self-in-

dulgence. Your heart is good, and so are your abilities."

"The former profits me nothing, the latter I have never turned to better account than does a professional jockey," he replied bitterly. "Under such circumstances what would you have me do?"

"Do?" echoed she with flashing eyes and slightly raised voice. "I would *work*! Go out into the world, give up all the little petty luxuries which enslave and deteriorate, put my shoulder to the wheel, and earn my bread by honest toil, until such time, as Longfellow says, I could 'look the whole world in the face, and owe not any man.' Anything rather than defraud my neighbours."

"That is easier said than done. Practically if one turns oneself into a working man, and gains say a pound a week by the sweat of one's brow, life would not be long enough to pay off back spans."

"I would rather be the working man on a pound a week, with an honourable ambition, than he who lives on in idleness and corruption."

His brow darkened as he listened to her words. In his inmost heart he knew her to

be right, he honoured and respected the sentiments she gave vent to, and yet he did his very best to combat and reduce them into insignificance.

"Talking is easy enough," he said impatiently, "but in my position you have no idea how great the temptations are to spend money. It flows like water on every side, often without any power on my part to hinder it. The regimental expenses mount up enormously to begin with. No one would believe to what an extent who was not behind the scenes. Then we guardsmen are always knocking about town, and expected to entertain our friends, dispense hospitality, and put our hands in our pockets on every occasion."

"You might exchange into a cavalry regiment."

"Yes, and be ordered off for India. I've often thought of doing so, but the old governor objects to the plan. It's mighty easy for rich fellows with several thousands a year to keep clear of debt. If I had lots of tin to-morrow I'd never owe a sixpence, but do you know what my income is?"

She fancied he might think she wanted to

inform herself of the state of his finances, and a shrinking delicacy from any such desire made her say hastily—

“Not in the least, but please don’t tell me. It can make no difference one way or the other.”

Perhaps she herself hardly knew that she loved him so well money could never come between them, that were he a Cræsus or a pauper it was alike indifferent to her, but he, as usual, put a totally different construction on her meaning.

“I’m not such a big fool as to fancy for one moment that it *could* make any difference to you,” he said irritably; “nevertheless for my own satisfaction I should like you to be informed of the fact that I possess but eight hundred a year. Now,” narrowly scanning her features, “can you wonder if upon so paltry a sum I find it next door to impossible to make both ends meet? is it matter for surprise if debts accumulate in an alarming fashion and payment becomes a mockery, or do you still blame me as much as ever?”

“Yes,” she said steadily, raising her clear eyes to his with a fearless gaze. “I do. To use your own words I blame you just as

much as ever. Instead of cutting your coat according to your cloth—ever since you first entered the army, you have apparently been living beyond your means, spending money in fact, which is not yours to spend. I have already expressed my views on that subject. What you ought to do is to exercise a certain amount of self-denial, give up some of your pleasures, even if needs be reduce your stud.”

“What, and go away from Foxington in the middle of the hunting season?”

Her lip trembled, but she steadied her voice bravely and said—

“Yes.”

“Well! you *are* a Job’s comforter!” he said with an audible sigh.

“Am I? Won’t you acknowledge me to be in the right?” she replied, trying to speak cheerily. “I mean all for the best.”

He hesitated. There was an inward struggle going on within him. Then suddenly his better nature gained the upper hand over self, long habit, and acquired inclinations.

“I know you do,” he said frankly. “And I know also that you are right, that I am a perfect brute; but if Snowflake wins I promise to

turn over a new leaf and become a reformed character. Kate," and his voice softened, and the grey-blue eyes shot out an electric dart which thrilled her very being, "Kate, will you be my mentor and help me in my good resolutions? I almost think that if you would I might improve in earnest. Nobody has ever talked to me like this, or acquired such influence over me since my dear mother died."

Her tears were rising fast, but she could not bear that he should see them, or that she, who was usually so self-possessed and cool, should be caught thus deeply moved. Woman-like she sought refuge in a counter interrogation.

"And supposing Snowflake does not win? Will you—will you—really—make a b—b—bolt of it?"

The full lips quivered pitifully in spite of their owner's vaunted courage and determination, but they were turned away, and Jack Clinker could not see their tremulous twitchings.

"Yes," he said firmly. "In that case India will most likely be my destination. If I exchange I shall get double pay, and pro-

bably earn more than if I were to turn myself into an *honest*”—he emphasized the word—“but homely agriculturist. I would sell all the gees, all perhaps except dear old Snowflake and Opal, whom I should like to keep if only for the sake of ‘auld lang syne,’ and live the life of a regular miser until fortune once more began to smile.”

She did not answer. Her heart was too full for speech, and the possibility of his going far away wrung it strangely. Neither seemed disposed for further conversation, and they rode on in silence, with the rain trickling down their moist faces and the dark, shiny coats of their respective horses.

Presently she said in an almost inaudible voice, as if she had at length arrived at some conclusion to her thoughts—

“I hope to goodness Snowflake will win.”

Her words broke the spell that was fast falling between them.

“Yes,” he said gravely, “it will be a bad look out for me if we are beaten. But come”—making an effort to throw off the feeling of depression that seemed creeping upon them both—“it’s foolish anticipating misfortunes which may never occur. It was

just like my selfishness to tell you anything about these worries. Why could I not have kept them to myself? Any how we will try and look on the bright side of affairs. After all, it's not the first mess I've been in by a good many, and somehow or other I have always managed to pull through. So let's cheer up."

But Kate shook her head, refusing to be comforted, for a vague presentiment of evil had cast its oppressive influence around her.

"Come, come," he said once more, seeing how grave she looked, and trying very hard to appear cheerful. "We have talked ourselves into a regular fit of the blues instead of remembering that we are all going up to town together and mean to have a jolly time of it. That's right"—as a faint smile began to illumine the corners of her mouth—"you look more like yourself again. I hardly know you with that serious face, and without your usual cheery laugh."

So he rattled on, endeavouring to restore her to her customary gaiety, though all the time there was an uncomfortable choking sort of a sensation in his own throat which

rendered speech difficult, and finally brought about another silence.

The short December day was drawing to a close, the dusk was fast gathering round them, the soft rain pattered noiselessly to the ground in a continuous stream; lowering clouds filled the sky, uniform grey in colour, unrelieved by any streak of light, and close at hand shone the wet pavements of Foxington, under the tall, dull, flickering gas lamps, which struggled bravely to relieve the general gloom.

Where the cross-roads divided, just below the market-place, Jack and Kate came to a standstill.

"We part here," she said, holding out her small, dripping hand to wish him good-night. "Thanks for having escorted me home so carefully."

"Good-night," he echoed, holding it firmly in his own. "You promise to come, don't you? It's something to look forward to if the worst comes to the worst."

She bowed her head in token of assent, for she could not trust herself to speak. Two big tears had welled up into her eyes and overflowed, where they mingled with the

raindrops, chasing each other down her cheeks as she rode away. His horse was tired, and impatient to return to its warm stable, but he stood watching her retreating form until it was lost in the darkness of evening.

“Oh! my darling!” he murmured passionately, “if only I were worthy of you! If only I had not so cruelly misspent and misused my life, then perhaps I might have gained you; but as it is I feel ashamed to ask that you should link your destiny with mine. Ah! if we could but foresee the future, how differently we would act!”

Then he gathered up his reins and rode down the deserted street, on either side of which the gutters were filled with yellow racing water, and the dreary shops, down whose panes the rain trickled incessantly, looked dismal and forlorn, while M'liss shook her head with an angry protest which seemed to say as clearly as human speech, “Come, come, don't dawdle any longer. It's terribly wet. For goodness sake make haste and go home.”

On Wednesday afternoon, by the five o'clock express, a seemingly merry party

(although two at least of their number bore anxious hearts), consisting of Kate, Mary, Colonel Clinker, Messrs. Grahame and McGrath, travelled up together to the Metropolis. Conversation was general, and time passed so quickly and so pleasantly that all were surprised to find their destination arrived at, and St. Pancras, with its huge iron girders wreathed in fog and blackened by smoke, looming overhead. Cabs were hailed, boxes sorted and put on their top, and then the quintet reluctantly separated, after engaging to meet a few minutes before twelve on the Sandown platform the following morning. The two girls were handed into a four-wheeler and rattled off to South Kensington, in which district Mary's aunt, Mrs. Tryon, resided. The kind-hearted old lady greeted them both with great warmth and cordiality, and displayed an old-fashioned hospitality by forcing all sorts of different viands upon them during the meal which promptly ensued, while shortly afterwards Kate beat a retreat, declaring she felt uncommonly tired, having been out hunting all the forenoon. But when the morrow came she appeared fresh

as a sweet-pea, clad from head to foot in a dark green cloth costume, which fitted her like a glove. Change of scene had enabled her in part to throw off her forebodings, and she determined on thoroughly enjoying the present.

They found the three gentlemen already on the look out for them, and all got into an empty carriage together. The cards for the day were then eagerly scanned and as eagerly discussed, with sundry references to *Ruff's Guide* and the *Sporting Times*, while dear Mrs. Tryon, a benevolent smile dimpling her kind old face, nodded placidly over a copy of the *Daily Telegraph*, until at last her head subsided with a spasmodic jerk on to the shoulder of her nearest neighbour, who happened to be Mr. McGrath, where it contentedly reposed, giving rise to much laughter and good-natured comment.

Esher was reached before long, when, after recalling Mrs. Tryon to a sense of the situation, they all got out and walked two and two along the yellow gravel path leading straight up to the enclosure. There had been a very severe frost the night before, *which still covered the grass with a white*

time, and Colonel Clinker, digging the point of his stick into the earth, exclaimed—

“Humph! I don’t half like the look of things. It must have frozen like the deuce, for the ground is just as hard as iron. Awful bad luck! Exactly when I’m running Snowflake too!”

“Will it interfere with his chance?” said Kate in an undertone.

“I think not; he’s so uncommonly fit and well, but his poor old legs, I fear, may suffer. You see aged horses are different to three and four-year-olds.”

When Mrs. Tryon had been comfortably installed in a remote corner of the gallery, from which she could not possibly see any of the racing, but which she elected to choose as free from draught, Jack turned to Kate and said—

“What do you say, Miss Brewser; will you come and take a turn in the paddock? We’re rather early, but if you don’t mind I should like to go round to the boxes and see if Snowflake was none the worse for his journey up to town, and has fed all right since he came.”

She assented without any hesitation, and they departed accordingly, leaving the remainder of the party to follow at leisure. They made straight for the boxes, in one of which they shortly found Snowflake comfortably located. The groom's report turned out to be a most satisfactory one, and everything promised well. As his master approached the horse, and fondly felt his firm, swelling crest, he gave a loud whinny of pleasurable recognition, thrusting his soft muzzle forwards as if in search of the carrot he was wont to regale himself with.

Kate stood by watching attentively. From the close way in which Colonel Clinker had cross-questioned his man concerning the state of Snowflake's health she once again realised the gravity of the situation, and the importance of a successful issue to the day's proceedings. She began to feel nervous and excited.

"*Our race,*" said Colonel Clinker, addressing her, "does not come off till after luncheon, being third on the programme, but I've got to ride for a brother officer almost immediately. It's young Rassington's horse. He's a good lad, so I did not like to

refuse, but I know nothing about his gee. He's one he picked up quite lately."

"It's a hurdle race, isn't it?"

"Yes, two miles over eight flights of hurdles."

"Nasty dangerous things," said Kate viciously. "I detest them."

"And why, may I ask?"

"I don't know, but I wish you were not going to ride a strange horse."

He looked at her for a second in amazement. Then a sudden light seemed to break in upon his mind, and lit up all his face with a radiant smile.

"Do you mean to say that *you* are afraid, by any chance?"

A conscious flush rose to her brow.

"I'm an idiot," she said brusquely, without condescending to enter into further particulars.

"Ah! So even you admit to possessing some nerves at last," he retorted, stretching his long limbs in evident enjoyment of the fact. "I declare there goes the saddling bell, and I must be off. Directly the race is over I shall come and look you up, and we

will all go and have lunch together. Our fellows have got a tent over the way, just behind the coaches. Ah! here's Terry, just in the very nick of time. I say, old man"—as Mr. McGrath lounged carelessly by—"take care of Miss Brewser, will you, while I go and adorn, else I shall be late?"

Whereupon he ran off in a great hurry to don Mr. Rassington's racing colours.

"Mr. McGrath," said Kate confidentially, as soon as they found themselves alone, "what is your opinion of hurdle racing?"

"Well, upon my soul!" exclaimed he, feeling slightly at a loss when so directly requested to express his sentiments, "I've never thought much about it."

"It's dangerous, I suppose?" with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Ah! yes, of course, awfully dangerous," assented he, quite unsuspecting as to the drift of the question. "Fellows tumble about like ninepins."

"I wonder you like your friend riding in them, then?"

"What, Jack! do you mean? Gad! but my friend as you call him, does a good many

things I disapprove of and that I can't put a stop to."

"He ought not to be *allowed* to risk his neck unnecessarily, and ride all sorts of strange horses he knows nothing about, simply because he's asked to."

"Jack's such an awfully good-natured chap. He'd do anything for anyone."

"That's all very well; but"—

The conversation was here put an end to by the reappearance of no less a person than Jack himself, attired in a primrose satin jacket and cap, boots and long spurs.

"Hulloa!" he exclaimed with a laugh, seeing Kate give a little start of surprise. "Don't you recognize me in my racing togger? Do I look so very different?"

"Yes, rather," said she critically. "I should know you, however, anywhere from the sound of your voice."

It had a peculiarly sympathetic timbre, as explained before. But she did not tell him how among hundreds and thousands of voices it would always be *the one* voice to her. She thought so, however, none the less as he stood there before her, looking so bright and

thoroughly manly that few could have suspected the inward concern that consumed him.

And now the jockeys mounted their horses, and, emerging by the iron gates, walked slowly down the gravel drive under the bare trees in Indian file on to the racecourse, which, by this time, a cold, wintry sun had somewhat succeeded in thawing. Kate and Mr. McGrath hurried back to the enclosure only just being in time to witness the preliminary canter. Some little delay occurred before the half-dozen starters were sent on their way to an excellent start and came galloping past the Stand all together, though the very first flight of hurdles brought one of their number to grief, the rider escaping with an ugly shaking. When, however, the remaining five began the ascent for home young Rassington's horse shot out like an arrow from a bow, and spread-eagling his field in a style not often seen, cantered in, hard held, an easy winner, while his popular jockey was greeted on all sides by loud cheers and hearty applause. With the exception of that memorable occasion when she had steered *King Olaf* to victory Kate had never felt so

proud in her life. She loved hearing Colonel Clinker praised. And when he rode back into the paddock once more along the drive, sitting with careless ease in the saddle, his right hand resting on his thigh, and his face all flushed by success, she thought it more than good of him, while others were offering all sorts of varied congratulations, to look for her among the crowd and send her a bright little nod of recognition. Such trifles touch a woman's heart by their spontaneity.

"That's a ripping good nag of yours," he said to young Rassington as he dismounted. "Ought to win a big race some of these days."

Young Rassington's face shone with delight and the pride of ownership, as he fussed about his horse, favouring him to unusual marks of affection which that animal promptly resented by lashing out and laying back his ears in a most determined manner.

Lunch was now the order of the day, which meal Mrs. Tryon did excellent justice to, and apparently enjoyed immensely. The best part of an hour glided quickly by before she could be persuaded to recross the course; but the all-important event was close at hand,

and Colonel Clinker, before retiring to weigh in, made Kate promise to meet him in the paddock directly the race was over.

“Good-bye,” he said, half in play, half in earnest. “If I don’t pull it off either India or the parish workhouse will have to offer me a refuge. In the meantime, common prudence dictates the advisableness of looking after what loose cash I possess. Would you mind taking care of it for me, Miss Brewser?” pulling out a handful of heterogeneous coins.

When he was gone she counted them all most carefully, arranging the gold in a little heap, so that on his return their rightful owner should find none wanting, but among the silver she noticed a small, insignificant, much worn three-penny bit with a hole pierced in it. She turned it over in the palm of her hand, and a curious fancy stole over her to possess some little thing, no matter how trifling, belonging to him. The desire became so intense that honesty went to the wall, and she decided on committing what she regarded as a theft, though she carefully put a brand new piece in the place of *the one she proposed taking*, which latter

she dexterously tied up in the corner of her pocket-handkerchief. By the time this manoeuvre had been successfully executed the horses appeared on the scene of action, Colonel Clinker wearing his own colours; and as he settled himself in the saddle with an ease born of long practice, she could not help thinking how superior he looked to any of the other competitors. But now they were actually off, starting a little way below the Stand, and her attention was rivetted on the nine horses as they came boldly on to the gorsed hurdles. The majority cleared them brilliantly, but others got over in a very clumsy manner, while one timorous creature stopped dead short, and another, after smashing a couple of hurdles all to pieces, bolted out of the course in spite of every endeavour on the part of his rider to keep him straight. Needless to say that Snowflake acquitted himself satisfactorily. After the Huntingshire fences these artificial Sandown ones seemed to him mere child's play. The numbers were now reduced to seven horses who kept pegging steadily on, no accident occurring to thin their ranks. When they descended the hill, on the far side, they

improved the pace somewhat, Snowflake lying last but one, but going well within himself, and tearing at his bridle as if indignant at being thus forced to keep in the rear. By-and-bye they put on a spurt, and came thundering past the Stand the second time. The going was evidently greasy and bad, for the sun had only slightly thawed the outer crust of the earth, leaving the ground beneath quite hard, and the sound of the animal's hoofs echoed in the dry atmosphere with sharp, distinct thuds as they galloped by. Only half the distance had yet been accomplished; nevertheless, when the horses emerged from behind the hill on the left, one or two had evidently had enough already, and pecked badly at their fences. Four competitors only were still left to the front, and among these Snowflake's white coat was clearly discernible striding along smoothly and evenly. They flew over the water jump without a mistake, also the succeeding fences, and beginning to gallop in downright earnest, rounded the bend for home. Colonel Clinker managed to get an inside place, and hugged the rails with professional temerity. The *excitement* now became intense. Hilarion,

Daphne, and Snowflake ran locked together, with The Shaker only a length in their rear; but Hilarion's rider was calling vigorously upon his horse, and Daphne cut up soft directly she felt the whip, and, laying back her ears, refused to try. Jack Clinker, on Snowflake, sat well-nigh motionless. The gallant old hunter breasted the hill like a lion and seemed to have the race in hand, though Hilarion, with a game effort had contrived to shoot ahead for a moment. But at that instant Jack gave his horse a slight touch of the spurs, and, responding in a manner beautiful to behold, Snowflake with each stride reduced Hilarion's lead. It was a magnificent race; but cries of "Snowflake wins, Snowflake wins for a monkey" filled the air, as first his nose and then his neck crept past Hilarion's girths. It seemed like Colonel Clinker gaining by one of those artistic finishes when nobody could tell exactly how much he had in hand. The race was virtually over, and the faces of the Foxington division beamed with legitimate triumph. But at the very moment when victory appeared well nigh assured, what mysterious mishap was it that caused

the good horse to suddenly falter in his stride, and stop as if pierced in a vital part by a bullet? What had occurred, though he still struggled desperately on, with that courage so oft conspicuous in the hunting-field, to make him let Hilarion get his head once more in front, and catching him on the post, win the Great Sandown United Hunters' Steeplechase by a short neck? What? Why the back sinews of his near foreleg had given way badly, and poor Snowflake, to use a common racing expression, had broken down. In a minute Jack pulled him up, and was off his back, but even with the weight removed the horse could not do much more than hobble painfully on three legs. His owner bit his lip and shook his head with a gesture of absolute despair, for he loved the old horse dearly, and was not one to bear the loss of such a favourite with callous equanimity. A host of confused and painful thoughts surged up in his brain as he sadly led the gallant grey, now shorn of his glory, back to the paddock, away from the curious, bustling, unsympathetic crowd to the quiet and comparatively remote corner, where he had *begged* Kate Brewser to await his arrival.

Ah! what a different arrival to the one he had anticipated, and confidently looked forward to! His hopes had all been so suddenly dashed to the ground that as yet he could hardly realize the disastrous results of their overthrow. Snowflake's hurt occupied the foremost position in his thoughts.

"I'm afraid he's done for!" were his first sorrowfully uttered words to Kate, who advanced to meet him with a downcast countenance. "Poor dear old Snowflake," patting the drooping outstretched neck, "his bolt is shot, and never again will he carry me to hounds. Hang it all! I would give half a year's income for this not to have happened." As he bent down and felt Snowflake's injured limb she could see from the workings of his face how deeply he took the catastrophe to heart. Light as was Colonel Clinker's touch, the horse shrank from under it. He was evidently in great pain. "D—n that hard ground!" cried Jack wrathfully, and when he stood upright again Kate saw that there were *tears*—actually *tears* in his eyes.

"You will think me a most infernal fool," he said apologetically, brushing his sleeve across his brow *with a hasty shame-faced gesture.*

"But I can't help it. I was as fond of the dear old horse as if he'd been a human being."

All her heart went out towards him in loving sympathy.

"Fool!" she said reproachfully, laying her little hand on his arm with a soft, lingering pressure, "how can you wrong yourself by saying such a thing? I at least can feel for you in your misfortunes, and respect a man who shows so much honest affection for a valued friend."

Her own eyes were glistening as she spoke, but her words comforted him greatly.

"God bless you Kate," he whispered in a thick, husky voice. "You are one in a thousand. Very few women *can* enter so thoroughly into a fellow's feelings, but you—you understand without my telling you, that it's not the money I care for half so much, serious as it is, as the loss of my dear old horse."

"I know if anything happened to King Olaf I should be just as cut up as you are now. It's horrible the idea of dumb animals suffering, and all through their courageous desire to serve us. I often think we are not *half sufficiently grateful* to them."

Poor Snowflake! Well was it for him that now, in his hour of need, he owned a master who scorned to forsake him lightly, and cast him off as a man casts off an old shoe; one who for the sake of a few paltry sovereigns would not sell a faithful servant to end his miserable days between the shafts of a cab, writhing under the perpetual lash of a cruel whip, bowed down by neglect, crushed by starvation. Pleasant days were in store for his old age, far away up in the beautiful wild northern country, where the purple heather bloomed on the rugged mountain sides, and the rushing burns came tearing down like silver streaks through the granite boulders. There, some peaceful and sheltered spot would offer him an asylum. Perhaps some verdant, golden-starred field, hemmed in by shady trees, 'neath whose green branches his worn-out limbs could repose at will, and where nothing but the cackle of the old cock grouse, calling to his mate high up over head, would disturb the surrounding silence; where he could sniff the sweet fresh air through his distended nostrils, inhale all sorts of fragrant hedgerow odours, and roll backwards and forwards on the soft

sward, crushing in careless disregard the pink-tipped daisies and golden-hearted buttercups to the ground, and then rising with a struggle, a shake, and a snort, recall the triumphs of bygone days, the deep bay of the familiar hounds, the cheery sound of the huntsman's horn, the Whip's shrill "For-rard awa—a—y." Perhaps, too, now and again, that well-known master, who in many an oft remembered run, had guided him so fearlessly, might come to the meadow paling and hold dumb loving converse with the good hunter, whose memory others could never efface. That shaggy mane, and rough white head, that full blue eye and those mobile ears would even in the future continue to conjure up visions of a happy and triumphant past.

Ah, Snowflake ! broken down as thou art, it is well for thee that thou ownest such a master ; one who loves thee well and truly, and who will cherish thee until death. A master who looks upon thy kind, not as mere machines, but as valued friends, and whose warm heart sympathises with and feels for every living thing endowed with that mysterious pain-subjected vitality called life.

That evening at the theatre, Kate's

thoughts were far away. The actors and actresses conveyed no impression whatever to her mind. She looked at them, and listened to them mechanically, all the time feeling as if in a dream. She could do nothing but wonder whether Colonel Clinker would really execute his intention of going abroad. Three hundred pounds for the forage bill, and two hundred to atone for Snowflake's defeat. These she knew of already, and knew that payment was difficult, if not impossible. Then the idea suddenly struck her if only she could find means and do so anonymously, why should *she* not make good the deficiency? Money was nothing to her, she had more than she knew what to do with, and would never miss it, while it might possibly prevent his leaving. And then like a flash of lightning she realised what she had hitherto studiously endeavoured to ignore, namely, that though she had been warned against him as a flirt, a spendthrift, and an adventurer, she had fallen head over ears in love, exactly as Mrs. Forrester had foretold.

The music sounded strangely dead and weird, the lights glared with a hateful

brilliancy, a curious numb sensation stole over her senses.

"Is anything the matter?" whispered Colonel Clinker seeing how pale she looked.

"Only a headache," she answered with a struggling smile, though a heartache would have been nearer the truth.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked. "Will you have an ice, or a glass of water?"

"No, nothing, thanks. I daresay it will pass off by-and-bye."

She sat through the whole performance, though at the end of it she could no more have told what were the leading incidents than have flown. Her mind was occupied with but one thought, the thought of Jack's going away. Everything else sank into insignificance, and was subservient to it.

Poor Kate! She had lived twenty-two years of her life without having ever felt Cupid's torturing dart, but now at last, love, which steals upon mortals in so many different ways, gradually, swiftly, fiercely, gently, unconsciously, had overtaken her. She was in its toils, and felt its pangs as well as its pleasures. Life began for the first *time* to unfold like a panorama, and she was

new to the vastness it revealed. New to the poignant joys, and still more poignant griefs, to the large capacity for good or for evil she felt growing up within her bosom. So new—and perhaps so foolish, that when she retired to rest that night, and could enjoy the luxury of solitude, she took from her pocket-handkerchief, where it still lay concealed, that little coin, *his* threepenny bit, and pressed it to her lips. Then she passed a silken thread through the hole, and hung it like a charm round her neck, where the small, worn, blackened object lay in striking contrast to her white skin.

Oh, youth! Oh, love! Such are thy follies! if indeed can be called follies those sentiments of unselfish affection which soften and chasten the heart, rendering men and women more lenient to each other, more sympathetic, more unselfish, more discerning, and yet more tolerant of human failings. Surely in the words of a great national poet, “’Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all.”

CHAPTER II.

THE following day it came on to snow so hard, and Mrs. Tryon declared herself to be so reluctant to face the inclement atmosphere, that after many consultations, the two girls at length unwillingly decided on not going to the races, and accordingly devoted the forenoon to that occupation supposed to be congenial to the female nature, *i.e.*, shopping. Then as the weather grew steadily worse, and town looked dreary in the extreme, after making Mrs. Tryon promise to pay them a return visit at Sport Lodge, they took leave of that lady, and departed for Foxington by an afternoon train, instead of by the later one they had originally intended patronising. The homeward journey was accomplished without adventure of any kind, but when they reached Foxington, Kate was delighted to find a most welcome change had set in, for although the fields and hedges were still covered with snow, the air felt several degrees warmer, and there appeared every *prospect of a thaw* being imminent. Neither

were these hopes delusive, for early next day on looking out at the surrounding landscape, she perceived the green grass to be once more visible and the snow melting rapidly, although it still lay about in discoloured streaks, and in many places having drifted from the force of the wind overnight, formed tolerably thick heaps under the hedgerows.

Kate's first act on rising was to send a message out to Stirrup, asking his opinion whether the hounds would go out or not, whereupon the satisfactory answer returned that "they were pretty sure to do so later on in the day, though Miss Kate must be careful, as the going was very bad and slippery in places, and far from safe." Such a reply was not sufficient to deter Kate from equipping herself for the chase, more particularly as the meet happened to be within easy distance, and not further than three or four miles from Foxington. So though the sky looked overcast, as if there might possibly be another downfall imminent, she put on her covert coat and started a trifle later than usual, electing to ride King Olaf out herself instead of sending him on beforehand, as was her usual practice. On her way to the meet

she was overtaken by Colonel Clinker and Mr. McGrath, who had arrived the previous evening, in order to hunt next day.

"Hulloa!" exclaimed the latter jocularly after salutations had been exchanged on either side. "You're a nice young lady, you are! What did you mean by deserting us so unhandsomely in our misfortunes? Why we nearly lost our train fiddling about the platform, hoping you and Miss Whitbread would turn up. Jack grew quite melancholy at last, and predicted the dissipations of the Metropolis had proved so ensnaring, you would not return to Sport Lodge for an indefinite period, and yet the very first person we meet is your ladyship calmly going out to covert. Faith! but you should have seen the Chirper's face when Miss Whitbread did not put in an appearance! It was as good as a play, and the very model of a love-sick swain. Ha, ha, ha!" laughing heartily at the recollection.

"Dear me!" said Kate; "Miss Whitbread and I ought to feel very much flattered. We were not vain enough to imagine our absence would be the subject of any special regret. The fact of the matter was that, in spite,

or perhaps *because* of her precautions the previous day, Mrs. Tryon unluckily managed to catch a cold, and that cold knocked all our deeply laid plans on the head. The poor old lady looked out piteously at the elements, coughed and choked, and we really had not the heart to press our wishes. It seemed brutal to drag the dear creature out into that snow-storm. We were awfully disappointed at not going to Sandown, but there was no help for it you see. I hope you enjoyed yourselves ? ”

“How can you ask such a question when *you* were not there,” returned Mr. McGrath in his most extra gallant manner. “No, Jack and I went about dejectedly, and missed our cheery companions of the day before very much indeed. The weather was simply odious, and to make matters worse, it came on to blow a perfect hurricane, so that joking apart, you ladies were well out of it, besides which the cold was something intense, and whenever one cast one’s eye downwards, nothing but a long vista of purple nose presented itself to the view. The only pleasure I derived was from witnessing Jack’s repeated successes ; he steered no less than four horses to victory, and covered himself with glory.”

"And recouped his losses of the previous day I hope," said Kate, casting a furtive glance in his direction.

"Ah! that's a different thing altogether. Poor Snowflake was a crushing defeat to us all. But come now, don't you think Jack distinguished himself? I declare I felt quite proud of being his friend."

"And so you ought to, Mr. McGrath," said Kate decidedly.

"Don't be a born idiot, Terry," interposed Colonel Clinker bashfully. "You should shut that fellow up, Miss Brewser. He talks no end of nonsense, and if he gets the very slightest encouragement his tongue runs away with him altogether. He's a regular parrot, only, to do him justice, with all his twaddle he never snaps."

"Mr. McGrath and I understand each other," responded she smiling frankly. "His conversation never wearies me, on the contrary, I find it at times *most* interesting. I like people who volunteer confidences occasionally, and who save one the trouble of extracting them with infinite perseverance. But all this time you have not told me one single

word about Snowflake. How is *he* getting on?"

"As well as can be expected, thank you," said Colonel Clinker, to whom she had addressed the question; "but the back ligament is hopelessly sprung, and he'll never be fit to hunt any more. I saw Tom Canning, the celebrated trainer, at Sandown yesterday, and he presented me with a packet of plasters similar to those they use in the racing stables. Some wonderful cures, he said, had been effected through their agency, but to my mind the chances of Snowflake's resuscitation are exceedingly remote. I've never known a sinew really broken down to stand hard work, and at the first long day the horse comes home just as lame as ever. I hate all this beastly snow and frost like poison, don't you? They play old Harry with the quads. By-the-bye, I trust you intend riding cautiously to-day, Miss Brewser, and won't try and break your neck. I've got a superstitious fit on just now, and misfortunes never come singly. The fields are tolerably good going, but pray remember that the shady side of each fence is awfully hard and slippery,

besides most of the ditches being chock full of snow. The less everybody goes in for jumping the better."

"I must not follow *you* then, I suppose," said Kate archly.

"What does it matter what happens to such an unlucky dog as I?" he returned impetuously. "If I were to be killed out hunting to-morrow even my best friends could only look upon it in the light of a good riddance. No, Miss Brewser, don't follow me. I feel in a reckless mood to-day, and should only lead you into danger."

"And is not that danger the same for you as for me? Why should you say such things? You can't possibly mean them seriously?"—opening her big grey eyes wide with a pained expression of reproach.

"By Jove! don't I though? I don't believe, with the exception of my old governor, that there is a soul who would mind what really became of me. I am useful to fellows because I ride their horses, but beyond that nobody cares twopence. It is the way of the world; therefore it's useless reviling at it."

"What's the matter with you to-day?" looking at him wonderingly.

"Nothing. I'm in a bad temper, I suppose—ready to fly out at everything and everybody."

"And yet you expect *me* to follow advice you refuse to act up to yourself?"

"Yes. There can be no comparisons between a fresh young girl, with all the world at her feet, and a desperate fellow at his wits' ends like myself."

"You are unkind," she said, giving King Olaf a job in the mouth which sent him dancing on his hind legs, "and—and"—in a tremulous voice—"you don't understand."

That he certainly did not, for since Snowflake's misfortune he had been in one of those moods when all things seem to go wrong, and when one looks at the whole world with jaundiced eyes. There had been times when he fancied he detected some answering chord of affection in Kate Brewer's manner, but now he was disposed to look upon any such idea as a delusion and a fallacy, and to rail against himself as a madman and a fool.

"Come, come," interrupted Mr. McGrath with good-humoured concern; "you two are always sparring at each other about some-

thing or other. I believe you both love an argument, and therefore never lose the opportunity of plunging into one. But on this occasion, sorry as I am to side against the lady, Jack is perfectly right. The going really is *not* safe, Miss Brewser, so do please be careful."

She gave a little *moue* of contempt, but in spite of it, when later on the hounds found in a belt of thin plantations, and ran very fairly through them out into the open, she stuck to the road, along with a host of other reasonable sportsmen and women, whose bump of caution taught discretion in view of the uncertain state of the ground. So long as the hounds kept pretty well within sight Kate felt tolerably happy, but when they took a sudden bend to the right and could no longer be seen then she could bear the situation no more. King Olaf apparently shared the same opinion, for he was cocking his ears and prancing about in a perfect agony of impatience.

"Where are they? Where have they gone to? Can you see anything of them?" she asked with anxious insistence of those around. Then, when none but vague replies

were forthcoming, she exclaimed, "Oh ! it is dreadful to lose the hounds like this ! Can't we find them again ?"

"They be a turning towards us now, miss," said a good-natured farmer, amused by her evident excitement. "They're making for 'Orniblow Spinney, just over the brow of yon hill. If we jog on we shall cut 'em off beautiful."

And sure enough so they did, only when one by one the hounds leapt over the fence into the road, or struggling through the gateway put their noses to the ground and took up the scent with a joyous chorus of sound before dashing out of it again, Kate, remembering what she had recently endured, found the temptation to follow in their wake quite irresistible. A fair proportion of the crowd seemed attacked by a simultaneous impulse, and shoved through the open gate close at hand with a show of valour and a complacency not a little irritating to the daring few who had ridden close up to hounds from the first.

The sun now began to shine so brightly that the melted snow lay in shallow, fast-thawing pools in the furrows, just allowing

the green points of the grass to peep here and there through their midst, and splashing up in showery sprays as the horses galloped past. Scent, too, was improving, as soon became evident from the increasing pace. Up to this point a line of friendly hand gates had inspired even the most timorous with courage to proceed, and the field forged merrily ahead, for it really seemed as if the fun were likely to become fast and furious. But although the hounds did not check, a check was shortly destined to be placed on the ardour of the pursuers in the shape of a not-to-be-avoided obstacle, and this heroic multitude found a disagreeable problem staring it uncompromisingly in the face. To jump or not to jump, that was the question. On the one side to place life and limb in jeopardy, a state of things always rather trying, but rendered doubly dangerous by the snow; on the other to beat an ignominious retreat, probably never set eyes on hounds for the remainder of the day, and feel an uncomfortable inward sensation of cowardice.

Now he who has the courage to boldly turn away at the first approach of danger

escapes all those internal pangs which torture him who adopts a course of indecision, and dares not either advance or recede. This latter fears the opinions of his neighbours, yet fears the formidable fence in front still more, and so waits feebly, racked by self-torments, until finally borne backwards or forwards, as the case may be, passive and unresisting, by a heterogeneous crowd. To do the field justice, most of them did not hesitate for long, but executed a masterly retreat to the rear, and from thence into the road; for the fence which had baffled them, though not large, was essentially nasty, the snow in front of it having drifted to a depth of several inches, and so completely filled up the shallow ditch on the taking off side that it appeared almost impossible for horses to distinguish it. The fence itself was not very formidable, being little over three feet in height, but it had been lately trimmed, and the smooth pointed ends of the cut growers stuck up in its midst like an ugly phalanx of dangerous bristles. About a hundred yards to the right luckily there was a gap, across which a sheep hurdle had been placed, and it did not take long for the foremost horseman

or two to descend from their gees and lift it away, upon which it proved a comparatively simple matter to walk or crawl down into the ditch, scramble through the broken-down twigs of the fence, and so into the next field. But the passage of a large and impatient body of equestrians through a single small opening was not to be effected without considerable delay, despite the fact that the sterns of the leading hounds were already disappearing in the distance. The men could push, and shove, and jostle to their hearts' content, but Kate, as a lady, found herself at a considerable disadvantage, for the manners of the shires were not so chivalrous as to yield precedence to the fair sex on an occasion like the present, the accepted creed amongst the masculine members being that women who hunted ought to count as "good fellows," and be able to shift for themselves. But King Olaf was too thorough a gentleman to fall in with these views, and understood no reason for delay. Several times he endeavoured to rush at the gap, and was only restrained by an unusually firm hand, upon which he bounded up into the air with a half rear and impatient lunge at the bridle. In

fact he grew so irritable, his blood being thoroughly roused by the short gallop previously indulged in, that Kate, seeing an individual whose horse was probably equally troublesome diverge from the crowd, charge the fence, and get over with a bit of a peck and a flounder, saw no reason why she should not follow suit. What had been possible for him was surely possible for her, and King Olaf's eyesight was so remarkably good he was safe to see the ditch, filled with snow as it was, and take off rightly. Perhaps in her youth and inexperience she failed to realise the full danger of those treacherous stakes. Anyhow she charged the fence. But whether King Olaf got too close to it, or whether the snow balled in his feet and impeded his true action, was impossible to determine. Anyhow he slipped, and floundered through the low fence with an ominous crash into the next field, where he pitched right on to his head, sending Kate flying almost out of the saddle. A moment of excitement and suspense ensued; then, from where she was clinging to his mane, quick as a cat—for like a true thoroughbred horse King Olaf had always a leg to spare—she saw him throw

out his two forelegs, and with a powerful effort to right himself, and a backward toss of the head which caught Kate on the chest and helped her back into a proper position, the gallant little horse recovered, and managed once more to regain his footing.

"That *was* a near thing," thought Kate. "I've never known King Olaf so nearly down before; but no matter, we're over, and all's well that ends well."

But had it ended well? For when she set King Olaf going again, all at once it seemed as though he could scarcely move. She felt sure he must have hurt himself, and fancied that in the struggle to rise from the ground he had somehow or other sprained his shoulder. She looked down anxiously, but failed to detect any outward sign of injury, and tried to comfort herself by thinking the horse might be suffering from some temporary blow, the effects of which would probably pass away in a little while. By heel and by voice she urged King Olaf on, and the courageous animal, though something evidently was amiss, did his best to respond to his mistress's desires, trying hard to keep pace with those who were now passing him

by the score. The brave spirit was willing enough, but the flesh weak. He cantered feebly and slowly across the heavy grass field in which they found themselves, stumbled out of it into the plough, over a tiny bank, and then relapsed into a laborious trot.

Kate was rapidly becoming more and more alarmed, for she knew his gallant disposition so well, she felt sure something very serious must be the matter. Times out of number that she had ridden her favourite chestnut, she had never known him to lag like this, or to display such a dull and drooping spirit. She made up her mind on the spot to go straight home, and see if she and Stirrup between them could not discover what ailed him.

“Misfortunes never come singly,” Colonel Clinker had said to her only that morning, and now all at once the words recurred to her ears with an ugly significance, and made the very blood in her veins curdle with dread forebodings. What could be the matter? What could have happened to King Olaf to have wrought so swift and terrible a change?

She had already begun to retrace her

steps, intent on putting her purpose into execution, when a sonorous voice from behind said—

“Beg pardon, miss; I ’ope you will forgive my making so free, but if you don’t get off ’is back direkly I’m afraid that there ’oss of yours will bleed to death. I’ve tracked ’im all across the snow for the last two fields.”

She turned hastily round and saw her friend the farmer, who had soothed her anxiety (when on the road fancying she had lost the hounds) a short time previously. His words made her heart give a great bound and then stand still with fright.

“Oh, how dreadful!” she cried in an agony of terror, “and I have been trying to force the poor thing on all this time. Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do?”

And she leaped from the saddle to the ground in desperate haste, tearing both elastics of her skirt as she did so. But grave as were her fears she was totally unprepared for the sight which now met her eyes—a sight that turned her perfectly sick with horror, for close under the girths, spreading from them almost to the springing of poor King

Olaf's thigh, hitherto hidden by the habit skirt, which accounted for her having failed to perceive the injury sooner, gaped a most frightful jagged and ghastly wound, at least eight inches in length, and of a depth impossible to say, while from each side the torn skin and lacerated flesh hung bleeding down like crimson curtains. Already, in those few seconds during which the horse had remained standing in one spot, the blood had dripped into a great red pool, where it lay in awful contrast to the white snow. The horror of the thing was such as to deprive Kate for the time being of all presence of mind.

"Oh! how dreadful, how dreadful!" she exclaimed shudderingly. "Can nothing be done to stop it? He will die if this goes on."

Then, in an ecstasy of self-reproach, she put her arms round the horse's drooping head, and crying as if her heart would break, said—

"Oh! King Olaf, my darling, my poor wounded darling. I am to blame for this. It was my fault. I took advantage of your being so good, and put you at a place that was not fair. Oh! if I live to be a hundred I shall never, *never*, NEVER forgive myself."

She might have remained in this condition indefinitely had not the farmer with a rough and ready sympathy recalled her to a sense of the urgency of the situation.

"Come, come, miss," he said kindly, "this will never do. Accidents 'appen now and again without its being in our power to 'elp them, so dry your eyes. I don't like to see you take it so much to 'art, besides which we ought to be a-thinking of the 'oss, and what's best for 'im."

This latter reasoning was all-sufficient. Kate controlled her tears with a brave effort, and said in a voice choked with emotion—

"Yes, yes! most certainly. Don't let us lose a minute. Every moment may be of importance."

"Well then," continued the farmer, "we had better try to get the horse into the nearest stable without waste of time. Poor thing, he's faint through a-losing so much blood, and no wonder; but there's no good to be gained by standing 'ere, so let's be moving."

"I—I—I suppose there's *no* hope?" she asked faintly, dreading to find her worst fears

confirmed. "He's sure to die?" with a little hysterical sob.

"Nobody can be sure of anything in this world, miss. It's impossible to say at present whether he'll pull through or not. I've known animals as 'ad a good sound consti-tooshun make wonderful recoveries 'afore now, there's never no saying 'ow these things may turn out from one day to the other. Its a terr'ble wound I admit, indeed I never seed a wusser, but while there's life there's hope."

A platitude from which Kate derived but small consolation.

"It must 'ave been them there sharp sticks," continued the farmer musingly. "I know that fence back yonder well. A nasty, trappy place as ever there was, and the growers just like so many spears since they've been cut. They have reg'lar gored the poor creature's stomach, like the 'orns of a bull, but it may only be a bad flesh wound after all. I 'ope to goodness 'is vitals is safe, for if so be as 'ow they are touched nothing can save the 'oss—not all the doctoring in this world, and it would be kinder to put a bullet through 'is 'ead at once; but as I said 'afore,

there's never any telling, we must 'ope for the best."

"It seems difficult to hope under the circumstances," said Kate dejectedly, looking at the frightful injury with inward misgivings. "Do you know if we are near any village, or how far we are from Foxington?"

"You won't get 'im that length *this* afternoon, miss. Foxington's a good four miles from 'ere, as the crow flies. There's no use thinking of 'is reaching 'ome."

"No use thinking of his reaching home! Good heavens! What am I to do then? Where am I to take him? I can't leave the horse to die out in the cold," and she wrung her hands in a state of frantic despair.

"Certainly not, miss; but if you don't mind letting him stand at my farm for a day or two just till we see 'ow matters is likely to turn, I think we could make the 'oss comfurble. My place ain't above 'arf-a-mile from this, and I've got a good warm loose box a-standing hempty. It's the one where my missus's old cob used to lie, but what with the rheumaticks, and the dairy, and one thing and another she ha' turned against

'unting o' late years, so that I took and sold Bob, that war his name, last February twelvemonth, and 'is box 'as stood idle ever since. You're welcome to the use of it, miss."

"Oh! thank you, I'm so much obliged. Let's make haste and get him there. I wonder," struck by a sudden thought, "whether I could induce anyone to ride into Foxington for me and tell the veterinary surgeon to come out immediately? In a question of life and death like the present I would willingly pay a man one pound, two pounds, *five* pounds to go without a moment's delay."

They had been outstripped by their companions; the majority of the Field, as before explained, had betaken themselves to the road, and not a soul was within hail. The farmer considered a moment, at last touched by Kate's distress and possibly by a desire to obtain so handsome a remuneration, he said—

"I don't mind, miss, if I goes myself. It won't 'urt my mare to canter into Foxington and back; more partic'lar as she ain't done nothing of a day's work. But I don't like leaving you all by yourself. Would you be

afraid to lead the horse back to my farm quite alone?"

There seemed much reason for the question, for King Olaf was so fearfully injured it really appeared doubtful whether he would ever succeed in reaching any homestead, and might not tumble down and die on the way. But Kate, even in her dire distress, was not "made of such slight elements."

"Afraid! no, certainly not," she answered promptly. "Tell me the way, so that I may start at once. But how are we ever to get on to the road? That's the difficulty. The horse can't possibly jump, it's out of the question; yet if my eyes," looking round, "don't deceive me, I can see no gate out of this plough anywhere. Do you happen to know if there is one?"

"Seeing as 'ow I have farmed the very land on which we are standing for nigh upon twenty years, and it belonged to my father, and 'is father 'afore that," responded the farmer with dignity, "I consider as 'ow I *ought* to know better nor most people. There ain't no gate, miss, sure enough, but there's a bit of a gap in yonder corner which my red cow with the crooked 'orn, made only the

day before yesterday, and me as 'ad intended building it up this very morning. It really looks like the 'and of Providence, don't it now? Well, we must manage to get the 'oss over it somehow, and then the road lies in a straight line pretty well close at 'and. There be no mistaking it." So saying he put his mare into a walk and rode on in advance, followed by Kate, who led King Olaf slowly through the sticky plough, her feet sinking in up to the ankles at every step, coming forth literally covered with clods of damp mud, which soon wet her thin riding boots through and through. Fifty yards or so, to her great relief, brought them close to the fence, a hairy bull-finch, which, however, as her companion had truly stated, was broken down, and presented a very feasible gap; nevertheless on the far side there remained a tolerably wide and boggy ditch to be jumped, which filled Kate with great dismay.

"What *are* we to do?" she cried in despair. "The horse will never get over this. In his present condition it's simply impossible."

"We never know what we can do till we try, miss," answered the farmer hopefully.

“Besides,” with a graver inflection of voice, “we *must* get over it. Here, give me the chestnut’s bridle while you see if you can manage to cross yourself. Hooray! That’s capital!” as Kate, taking a determined run at the ditch, succeeded in landing with a scramble and a flounder, hands and knees, into the mud on the opposite side, and by aid of an overhanging branch pulled herself up into an upright position. “None the worse I ’ope, only a bit dirty! Well, never mind, that can’t be ’elped, and now,” throwing her King Olaf’s bridle, “if you catch ’old of that and cheer the ’oss on he’ll go all right. I’ll be bound he knows the sound of your voice.” Upon which the farmer, on his big brown mare, went behind King Olaf and began energetically cracking his hunting crop, while Kate in every tone of imploring endearment encouraged the horse to proceed, until at length, after standing uncertainly poised on the brink of the ditch for several seconds, changing his feet, and moving his forelegs uneasily, the courageous animal, game as a bantam cock, gave a spring, and by dint of much effort got safely over.

though the increased motion made the blood from his wound spurt forth afresh.

“First-rate! couldn’t be better! Well done you!” ejaculated the farmer admiringly, at the same time giving vent to an audible sigh of relief at the success attendant on this ticklish job. “And now, by your leave, and if you be quite certain as ’ow you don’t mind, I’d best be off and make sure of the vet. You cannot go wrong if you was to try. Keep to your left on the track close to the hedge for a couple of ’undered yards, at the end of which you will see a five-barred gate leading straight into the ’igh road. Then turn sharp to your right, and follow your nose till you come to Silverstone village. It ain’t above ’arf a-mile, if so much, and when you get there anyone will tell you where I live. Farmer Hammond be my name,” preparing to depart.

“Very well,” said Kate. “I am so *very*, *very* much obliged to you.”

“Pray don’t mention it, miss. We all of us stands in need of a ’elping ’and now and again. By-the-bye, is there any message I can leave for you at Foxington, or give to

any gentleman out 'unting in case I *should* 'appen to come across the 'ounds on my way?"

She caught eagerly at the suggestion. "Oh! yes," she said; "I am so glad you thought of it. If by chance you meet Colonel Clinker—you know Colonel Clinker, don't you? A tall, good-looking gentleman, with fair hair and blue eyes, riding a young roan mare, with a bang tail, tell him that I, Miss Brewer, have met with a most dreadful accident, and shall be so thankful if he could come to me. That is to say," hesitating through fear of spoiling his enjoyment, "if hounds are not running well. You understand? Don't bother him if they are having good sport." She could not help it. Her first impulse was to seek assistance from him, to long for his presence, for the sense of protection and comfort it never failed to inspire. Now that she was in trouble it seemed so natural to turn to him, to shift the responsibility of action from off her shoulders on to his.

"All right, miss," said Farmer Hammond cheerily. "I'll do my best to find the gentleman. I knows 'im well by sight, and a

thorough gentleman he is, too, as everybody in these parts agrees. Is there no message 'afore I start?"

"Oh! Mr. Hammond, if you are really so good as to ride into Foxington, perhaps you would not mind trotting just half a-mile further, and telling my groom, whose name is Stirrup, to put some things together at once, the horse's clothing and anything else he can think of, and setting off in the trap *directly*. It won't do to leave King Olaf alone all through the night. Somebody will have to sit up with him, so I hope you won't mind my sending for my own man? You see the horse is sure to require a deal of care and attention, and Stirrup is a very decent old fellow, not likely to give much trouble."


"Don't mention the trouble, miss. It ain't of no account. But I think as 'ow it will be a very good plan for your own groom to come over. He's used to the 'oss and the 'oss to him, and they understands one and another's ways. Besides which, you'll feel 'appier in your mind yourself." With which parting words Farmer Hammond rode off at a good round trot, astonishing his old mare to some tune by the unusual but

vigorous application of a pair of rowelless spurs, leaving poor Kate to trudge all by herself on the solitary country road, leading with sorely anxious and heavy heart the wounded creature who had carried her so often and so brilliantly to hounds. "Shall I ever ride him again? Will that back ever bear my weight in the future?" were the questions that forced themselves upon her as she gazed at the empty saddle and loosely swaying reins. And the thought that she might never do so, that she had for the last time felt beneath her the arch of that bending neck, the spring of that elastic gallop, filled her eyes with tears and her heart with a bitter sorrow.

"Oh! King Olaf, King Olaf!" she repeated. "It was all my fault. The fault of your ignorant, stupid, *cruel* mistress!"

No half mile had ever appeared so interminably long, for the horse could now only move very slowly, and with each step a great red drop oozed out from the wound, and fell with a splash on the muddy road, while each drop was like a drop of her own life-blood flowing, from the agony it inflicted on her sensitive nature. The sight of the

blood and the sickening fear of his death, made her feel quite faint and ill, but she would not give in. Everything depended, or seemed to depend just then, on her getting him as quickly as possible into a comfortable stable. King Olaf was growing stiff and cold, he hung his head with unmistakable symptoms of pain, and his eye looked dull and heavy. An end however comes to all things, and at last a turn in the road revealed the village of Silverstone close at hand. After twice stopping to inquire the way of gaping labourers, Kate finally succeeded in finding Mr. Hammond's house, and brought up before the farm-yard door. Here she discovered a stableman lounging in comparative idleness, and after a brief explanation, impressed the gravity of King Olaf's case so far upon him, as to induce him without further parley to lead the horse into a clean and cheerful loose box. When he saw the wound the man shook his head in an ominous fashion, and immediately made haste to loosen the girths, remove the saddle, and throw a warm rug over King Olaf's quarters, for what between the cold and the pain, the poor animal was quivering like an aspen leaf. But having



performed these kindly offices, neither he nor Kate seemed quite to know what steps to take next for the best. The case was one outside their limited experience, and demanding more skill and science than either of them possessed. After a bit, however, the man, struck by a brilliant idea, suggested a warm mash, and went off to see to its preparation, leaving Kate leaning up against the wall of the box in a state of feverish inaction, and resolving to study Youatt and Fitz Wygram on the earliest occasion. She realized in full the lamentable ignorance she displayed when an emergency arose, and determined if possible to amend it. The sound of hoofs rattling on the stone flags in the yard outside, came as an immense relief, and going out she found Mrs. Forrester arriving in hot haste.

"Ah! there you are," exclaimed the old lady, with a friendly nod. "I heard that you had met with a bad accident, so left the hounds immediately to see if I could be of any good. I was told that you had staked your beautiful chestnut horse very badly, but I hope the report is untrue?"

"Alas! no!" replied Kate. "I wish it

were. I'm in despair. But how kind of you to come to my assistance. You've no idea how deserted and forlorn I began to feel." Indeed she was grateful for any society to divert the utter misery of her thoughts.

"Were you at all hurt yourself?" asked Mrs. Forrester kindly.

"No. I wish to goodness I had been if it could have spared him in any way, but he recovered himself in a truly marvellous manner. I fear, however," and the ready tears once more welled up into her eyes, "that he is most terribly injured. I never saw such a place as it is."

"Let me have a look at him." And then Kate led the way into the box, and Mrs. Forrester, leaning forward, gently lifted up King Olaf's rug, and with the practised eye of a professional surgeon, carefully inspected the wound. "You're right," she said, in her deep matter-of-fact voice. "This is a bad business, a *very* bad business. Still we must try what we can do to relieve the horse and make him more comfortable. He seems in great pain, but I think we can ease that."

little; any way for the present. How long has he been standing here like this?"

"I really can't say exactly. About twenty minutes, or half an hour."

"You've sent for a vet., of course?"

"Yes, Mr. Hammond has gone to fetch him, and also to tell my groom to come out as quickly as possible."

"Ah! that's right. This is a case of stitching, and the sooner the vet. arrives the better. In the meantime, the first thing to be done is to endeavour to prevent the air from getting into the wound. Have you got a chemist's shop in this village of yours?" turning to the man who had re-entered the stable.

"Yes, marm," he replied. "There be one close by, just at the end of the street."

"So much the better. Now I want you to get me a bottle of carbolic acid, and from three quarters to an ounce of laudanum, that is to say, if such articles are sold here."

"Let *me* go," said Kate eagerly, feeling any useful employment to be a positive relief after her enforced inaction. "I will run all the way."

"All right then," said Mrs. Forrester,

“the man can be of use to me while you are gone, but be as quick as you can for I want to bandage the wound up without a minute’s further delay, and don’t forget to bring back a sheet of lint. We shall want that first and foremost.”

Kate needed no urging to dispatch, she flew down the road just as fast as her two legs could carry her, and in an incredibly short space of time returned flushed and panting with the requisite necessities, which she had been fortunate enough to procure.

“Ah! that’s capital,” said Mrs. Forrester in tones of satisfaction, when she perceived the successful issue of her mission. “And now we can set to work in earnest. You must know, Miss Brewser, that carbolic acid is an invaluable agency in the dressing of wounds, possessing highly antiseptic properties, which destroy the formation of putrefactive germs. I am a firm believer in the Listerian theory.”

Once again Kate cursed her ignorance. She had only heard of it vaguely.

“How clever you are!” she said with a spontaneous admiration, by no means lost upon its object. “I wish I knew a tenth

part of what you do. The truth is, although I have hunted a good bit off and on, I am as inexperienced as a baby in all matters connected with horseflesh requiring more than the most ordinary knowledge. Such a state of things is positively disgraceful ! ”

“ Not at all, since you have the wish to learn, my dear,” returned the old lady graciously. “ Besides you are very young, and there is plenty of time before you. Remember I have had a considerable start, in regard to years, which makes all the difference. And now—I am going to dilute the carbolic acid with water, one part acid to forty water being the correct proportions, but first we must make use of hot fomentations, to wash away the congealed blood, and any irritating foreign matter that may possibly remain lodged in the wound.”

So saying Mrs. Forrester, having directed the man to fetch a bucket full of warm water, herself proceeded, with a light yet firm hand, to sluice the injured part with a sponge. Poor King Olaf winced at the slightest touch, more especially when dexterously bringing the two lips of the wound as nearly together as they permitted, this accomplished amateur

applied a large piece of lint, thoroughly soaked in the solution she had recommended to Kate. She displayed no hesitation, no feminine shrinking at so ugly a job. Mrs. Forrester evidently knew what she was about, and set to work in a cool business-like fashion which in some measure restored Kate to confidence and hope.

"Now," she said, holding the lint in its place with her hand, "quick, bring me a roller, or a piece of coarse linen, with which to make everything fast. There," as she accomplished the affair successfully, "that's done at any rate! and may be the means of preventing the horse catching cold, until Mr. Bryan arrives. The next thing for us to do is to give him a drink that will deaden the pain. You got some laudanum, did you not, Miss Brewser?"

"Yes!" said Kate, feeling more and more amazed by the profundity of her companion's knowledge. "Here it is. What use are you going to make of it?"

"I like people who ask questions," said Mrs. Forrester approvingly. "And if folks wish to enlarge their minds they should never be ashamed to confess their own ignor-

ance. Well, you see, my dear, the principal danger we have to contend against in a case of this sort is of peritonitis setting in. The laudanum not only numbs pain, but also exercises a wonderfully soothing influence on the action of the intestines, a matter just now of great importance. A small dose often works wonders, and any how can do no harm. There now! poor fellow!" she added, having administered the drug, and patted King Olaf's neck, "we can do nothing more for you until Mr. Bryan turns up with his sewing apparatus, which we must hope may be soon."

Kate thanked Mrs. Forrester most warmly for her kindness. "It is awfully good of you," she said, "taking so much trouble on my behalf. I feel as if I could not thank you sufficiently."

"I hate thanks," was the brusque reply. "All my life I never could bear to see an animal in pain. If I can relieve them I must, that's just the truth, and what's more my dear," with more emotion than one could have given her credit for, "I feel for you also. I know what it is to lose a good hunter. I had one once I was exceedingly

fond of. He ran a stake into the fleshy part of his thigh, out hunting with the Critchley, over a mere nothing of a fence, and though all was done that human experience could devise, he died from mortification, exactly a week after the injury had been inflicted."

"Dear me! that was very sad; and makes me tremble for King Olaf. Do you think, Mrs. Forrester, that there is any chance, however small, of his ultimate recovery? If only I might hope"—

"That is a question neither I nor yet anyone else can answer. Very much will depend on how he goes on in the course of the next day or two. If he gets over them fairly well, and no unfavourable symptoms set in, we may begin to gain confidence. His strength should be kept up in every way. Hard boiled eggs beaten up in milk, or even strong beef tea are both excellent for that purpose. A good bottle of port wine when a horse is weak and below par and the inflammation has subsided, may also be of service. But Mr. Bryan, no doubt, will prescribe properly, for he's reckoned very clever among the profession, and passed no end of stiff examinations—not that they always go for much."

As she finished speaking Colonel Clinker came galloping into the yard, having evidently not delayed an instant after the reception of Kate's message, for Opal was covered with foam, and he himself splashed all over from head to foot.

"Thank goodness!" he exclaimed in tones of relief when he saw Kate standing, safe and sound, talking to Mrs. Forrester. "I have been in such an awful fright, thinking you had had another cropper, and hurt yourself again."

"No, it's not me this time," she said. "It's worse—it's King Olaf."

"I can't agree with you there. But what's the matter? Nothing very serious, I hope?"

"Yes, something too dreadfully serious. King Olaf is frightfully staked. It makes me shudder even to think of it."

Whereupon both ladies proceeded to give Colonel Clinker an account of what had happened. After hearing it he looked at the horse, but did not attempt to remove the bandages which had been effectual in checking the loss of blood. He was of opinion that Mrs. Forrester had acted with admirable *wisdom*, and done everything that, under the

circumstances, lay in her power. "In fact," said he, "it's really a pity you should stay any longer and give up your day's hunting. I will look after Miss Brewer and see her safely home. I left the hounds quite close to this, and if you go at once you will have no difficulty in finding them."

Mrs. Forrester's first decision was not to lose sight of so grave and interesting a case, but second thoughts appeared best, for she suddenly began winking audaciously at Jack and said—

"Sly dog! Ah! yes, of course! Never mind, I understand all about it and don't want to spoil sport."

He bit his lip and frowned. These allusions irritated him sorely.

"There's no sport to spoil," he said gloomily.

"You can't expect me to believe that in a hurry."

"I don't care what you believe. It's a fact nevertheless.

"Well!" said Mrs. Forrester, turning to Kate, "I don't half like leaving you in the lurch, but I can't be of any more use at present, so I may as well catch up the

hounds again. Besides I leave you in good hands. Colonel Clinker says he will see you home."

"It seems my fate to be a perpetual nuisance to my friends," said poor Kate. "I wish I could do something to show my gratitude in return."

"Tut, tut, don't talk nonsense; anybody to hear you would think I had done something wonderful instead of performing a most ordinary action of humanity," replied the old lady quite testily.

To give her her due, underneath all that outward hardened crust of manner beat an unusually warm heart which sympathised on most occasions with her fellow creatures in spite of that sympathy being not infrequently displayed in an original fashion. She remounted her horse, and after making Kate promise to write and tell her the result of Mr. Bryan's visit, rode off at a steady jog-trot to re-find the hounds, and finish her day's hunting like the kind old lady she really was, sacrificing her natural inclinations and desire of gaining fresh experience in the veterinary science to the Machiavellian policy of *leaving* the young couple together.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN they found themselves alone Jack Clinker said to Kate—

“Do you believe in presentiments, Miss Brewser?”

“I hardly know,” she replied. “It is so easy, once a thing has happened, to persuade yourself into the idea you had always foretold it.”

“You don’t remember then the remark I made this morning about misfortunes never coming singly? It certainly was not a very original one; nevertheless all through the morning I have had an uneasy feeling that something was going to happen. There’s a fatality about these things. Just fancy, Snowflake breaking down badly and then King Olaf half killing himself! One grows quite jumpy over such misfortunes. I wonder what will be the next one to overtake us?”

“Don’t talk of any more, for goodness sake! We have had enough and to spare as it is, without predicting others. I had no idea you were so superstitious. Do you

know," dropping her voice to an uneasy whisper, "I feel so shaky and demoralized that if King Olaf—d—d—dies I do not really think I shall ever care to go hunting again. When all goes well it's delightful, and following hounds the greatest physical pleasure that exists, but when accidents like this occur a revulsion of feeling sets in, and one tells one's self that the game is not worth the candle, that one stands to lose too much and to gain too little."

"Come, come," he said, endeavouring to comfort her, seeing also how thoroughly upset she was by what had taken place. "I will not have you give way to such gloomy views. Like everything else in this world, hunting presents its bright and its dark side, but of the two the former decidedly predominates. I always pity those poor devils who kick their heels about town all through the long months of winter fog, and have no better resource than to toddle down to their clubs and play a rubber of whist or game of picquet. No, no, depend upon it, in spite of occasional casualties, we hunting people have out and out the best of it, and *lead far the cheeriest lives.*"

He had such a pleasant way of talking, and of looking at things in general, she could not feel very downhearted when he was near. Her fits of depression only recurred in his absence.

“And what about India?” she summoned up courage to ask in a subdued voice. “Are you really going?”

“We will discuss that some other time. It’s too long a question to enter into just now, and one that will require a good deal of consideration. I can’t be here to-day and gone to-morrow however, if you mean that.”

She did not ask for any further explanations, though she derived considerable consolation from this assurance, having dreaded, since Snowflake’s disaster, that Colonel Clinker might pack up his things any day and depart without giving her premonitory warning.

“You intend finishing the season then?”

“I don’t know; it depends on what turns up, but very probably”—

At this moment Stirrup arrived in the phaeton, looking terribly agitated, accompanied by Mr. Bryan, whose cob having only returned from a twenty mile journey, was glad to profit by the offer of a lift out.

After some conversation and a preliminary inspection of King Olaf, Colonel Clinker took Kate aside, and said to her very gently, yet with a certain authority of manner—

“I think, Miss Brewser, you had better go and wait inside the house for a little while the operation of sewing up the wound is being performed. Witnessing it will only give you unnecessary pain, and you have borne quite enough already. The sight is not pleasant for a lady’s eyes, besides which you have now been on your legs for some hours, and what between the excitement and the worry will only knock yourself up if you don’t take care. You ought, too, by rights to change those boots,” noticing how wet they were when Kate began to walk. “You’ll catch your death of cold if you don’t. I daresay one of the women folks will lend you a pair of dry shoes.”

“I can’t think about myself,” she said impatiently.

“All the more reason for others to do so then. I can be very stern and very tyrannical when I choose. I shall order some tea to be got ready, and tell Mrs. Hammond to make you take off those wet boots and stockings.”

"I don't feel as if I *could* sit still, while everybody else is working and doing some good, it is so hard to remain useless. Inaction always falls to the lot of we poor, wretched women."

"Never mind about that! What are we men here for except to take care of you when we get the chance, and help to carry some of the burden oppressing the weaker shoulders? Besides, the 'courage that bears and the courage that dares' are one and the same. There's no difference between them. You are brave enough in all conscience—don't give in now. Imagine yourself a child and I your schoolmaster. Well! I order you to go in, take a rest, and have something to eat and to drink; then, if you are a good, obedient girl, I promise to look in every few minutes and report progress. Besides, I'm selfish and want some tea myself. Won't you give me a cup just to show there's no ill-feeling between us?"

There were times possibly when Kate Brewster was wilful and wayward. She had been left with a large fortune at an early age, and no one to consult but herself. She was accustomed to be indulged and spoilt,

and, possessing a keen intelligence, often felt quite on a par with those with whom she was in the habit of associating, so that she considered her opinion as good as theirs. But this was only when she came in contact with weak people, or stupid people devoid of intellect. Directly she recognized a superior spirit, she was willing to bow to it, and learn of it, which perhaps was the reason why she was such a universal favourite among old people. Colonel Clinker's kindness, his soft entreating voice, and persuasive manners, conquered her nature altogether. She could no more have opposed him, when he talked to her like this, than have opposed her dead uncle had he risen from his grave.

"Very well," she said, without offering another word of remonstrance. "I will do what you wish, only, mind you come. It will be awful, staying there all alone."

"Oh! yes, I'll come," he promised, thinking that in many ways she still possessed a sweet childishness of manner. "There's the tea, you know, as an inducement." And then with a smile and a nod he went outside, and left her to her own resources. Perhaps the hardest trial that Kate endured that day

was having to sit in a little close parlour, furnished in horsehair, crochet antimacassars, and wool mats, and respond to the well-meaning, but evidently forced conversation of Mrs. Hammond, a most excellent and worthy woman, the history of whose birth, parentage, fortune, marriage, and internal ailments failed, however, after a while, to prove either interesting or amusing. Kate's thoughts, all the time, were busy with King Olaf, and she longed at least to be left alone. But Mrs. Hammond's small-talk was ceaseless and persevering, and there was nothing for it but to sit and smile, and endeavour to respond, in a fitting manner, when a response was clearly imperatively demanded. The situation grew unendurable. Kate framed all kinds of stern speeches, such as "Woman, don't you see I'm in trouble, can't you leave me alone?" or "My good soul, please don't mind me, if you are busy," or "For goodness sake, stop cackling for one minute!" but although she cogitated such speeches thoroughly, directly an opportunity arose of expressing them her heart failed her in the most ignominious manner, and she continued

to smile, and to nod, and to ejaculate, so that Mrs. Hammond was quite charmed with her guest's affability, and confided to the partner of her bosom, later on, "that of all the pleasant young ladies Miss Brewser was the pleasantest one as ever she 'ad come across."

"Aye, and liberal too," added he, remembering the five golden sovereigns, sweetly jingling in his trouser pocket. "A reg'lar tip-topper."

It is often inconceivable how the minutes fly when we are enjoying ourselves, yet at other times Old Time seems to require a good jog to bustle him up. Had Colonel Clinker not been endowed with a strong natural modesty, he could not have helped feeling flattered by the expression of pleased animation and joyous relief which overspread Kate's countenance on his reappearance.

"Oh!" she cried artlessly, "I am so thankful you have come!"

"Well, it is all over at last," he said, "and Mr. Bryan has bid me fetch you to pronounce on the results of his labours."

She went out to the stables immediately, overcome with delight at escaping from the parlour, and arriving there, was greatly com-

forted by the different appearance the wound now presented. Mr. Bryan had made a very good job of it, and stood by looking at his handiwork with not a little pride.

"I am in hopes no vital part has been touched, after all," he said to Kate reassuringly; "there's only this one little spot," pointing to a certain place as he spoke, "that looks suspicious, and as if the stake might have penetrated; however, we shall know more about it in forty-eight hours' time. I have given the horse a drink, and told your groom exactly what I wish done, and will look in again to-morrow morning before ten o'clock. I shall hope to hear then he has passed a tolerably comfortable night, and is going on favourably. And now we had better leave him alone. He has gone through a good bit, and the quieter he is kept the more advisable it will be."

"Will you drive Mr. Bryan back in the pony phaeton, Miss Kate?" suggested Stirrup respectfully. "The Colonel 'ee 'as 'is oss, and I promised Mr. Bryan we would convey 'im back to Foxington."

"With pleasure," she said, settling herself on her seat and taking up the reins. "Come

in, Mr. Bryan, please." Then she put out her hand to wish Colonel Clinker good-bye. "I don't dare express my thanks," she said, with a half-apologetic smile.

"That's right," he said with an answering one. "Between friends they are quite superfluous, but if you wish really to show your gratitude, be a good Samaritan, and let me fill Mr. Bryan's place to-morrow morning, when you come here to meet him. I feel the greatest interest in poor King Olaf."

Was it possible that just a tiny portion of it might be assumed?

"Are you not going to hunt?" she asked guilelessly.

"Oh! yes, later on. But there will be lots of time. And these double misfortunes have destroyed my nerve. Somehow I don't feel a bit keen."

Kate gave the desired promise and then drove off, extracting all the information she could, with reference to King Olaf's case, on the way home.

* * * *

By ten o'clock the following morning the party reassembled at Silverstone, and were

met by old Stirrup, wearing a most anxious and unhappy countenance.

"How's the horse?" asked Jack Clinker apart, in order that should the reply prove unfavourable it might not immediately reach Kate Brewser's ears.

"Bad, sir, wery bad indeed!" answered he huskily. "It goes to my 'eart to see 'im. 'Ee's never touched a morsel of corn, and 'im with such a happetite in a hordinary way. 'Ee seems to be suffering a deal of pain, too, hinards, breathes 'eavily, and changes 'is feet huneasily."

"That's a bad symptom," said Colonel Clinker, looking very grave. "I had hoped things might have improved, but I don't like the report at all."

"No more does I, sir. I would give 'arf a year's wages, and gladly into the bargain, to put King Holaf right again, and make 'im has 'ee was this time yesterday morning. Lord! Colonel, 'ee was full hof life then, and as playful as ha kitten, and now to see 'im, it's downright 'eartrending." Stirrup turned away abruptly as he concluded the sentence, overcome by the exceeding bitterness of the recollection.

“Whatever you do, don’t talk to your mistress in this way,” said Colonel Clinker hurriedly. “She’s so dreadfully cut up over the whole business. Try and make the best of things, and let her hope as long as she can. We don’t want to make her more miserable than she is already ; besides, it is just possible things may take a turn for the better. There’s never any telling.” So saying he entered the box, where Kate had gone on their first arrival. Poor King Olaf was standing up in it, with his head drooping listlessly, and his bright eyes dimmed with suffering. At the sound of Kate’s voice he slowly turned his neck, her presence seeming to cheer him somewhat. She had brought some sugar, and offered him a dainty morsel in the palm of her hand. He looked at it with dumb longing, as much as to say he would if he could, and turned it over several times with his soft nose. Then, as if the recollections it conjured up were too sweet to be withstood, he sucked it in between his flexible lips. Kate was delighted. But alas ! the taste no longer possessed any power to please, for after feebly champing at it once or twice, he let the lump fall uncrushed to

the ground. The ready tears sprang to Kate's eyes at the sight. "He won't even eat his sugar!" she exclaimed in distress. "He who loves it so, and would follow me anywhere for a piece. Oh!" almost angrily, as they tried to console her, "nobody need deceive me about his condition. It's only false kindness. I know quite well, without being told, that he is very, *very* bad indeed!" She buried her face in the horse's soft silky mane, and cried gently to herself. There was no denying the fact that, in his mistress's own words, King Olaf *was* very, *very* bad, wounded even unto death. Every now and again he would turn his head round, and gaze mournfully at his poor injured side, with a hopeless, resigned, and infinitely touching expression, which went to the hearts of all those present. Mr. Bryan now undid the bandages, dressed the wound, said it bore every appearance of going on well, but shook his head when told of the horse's total loss of appetite.

"If only he would begin to peck a bit, no matter how little, I should be more hopeful," he declared. "Try him," turning to Stirrup, "with everything you can possibly

think of." Then he gave King Olaf another reviving drink, and went his way, significantly stating that he would call in again during the course of the afternoon.

The following day a perfect tempest of wind and rain prevailed, so that Kate found it impossible to go over to Silverstone, and had to content herself with sending a stable lad to enquire after King Olaf's condition. The answer brought back was not encouraging, being to the effect that the horse showed no improvement, persistently refused to feed, and was growing weaker and weaker in spite of all endeavours to maintain his strength. Next morning, fortunately, the sun shone out brightly, and although the severity of the gale had been such as to uproot several large trees, whose branches lay about in all directions, the wind had subsided, and the air after the storm felt fresh and pleasant. Kate determined she would take poor King Olaf something nice, something that would really tempt him to eat, so directly after breakfast she went on to the lawn in front of the house, and with a pair of scissors snipped all the sweetest, greenest grass she could find, which she put into a basket, and carried

over to Silverstone in triumph. But when she got there, she was shocked by the terrible change for the worse which had taken place in King Olaf's appearance. The horse hung his head listlessly, as if the slender neck were quite unequal to bearing its weight aloft, his small ears felt cold as ice to the touch, his eyes—those beautiful blue eyes, which used to be so bright and full of life, were covered with a glazy film, his coat looked dull and staring, his breathing came and went in quick, flurried, feeble gasps, and already the pink flesh lining his mouth had turned a dark and unnatural colour.

“Oh, Stirrup!” cried Kate, while the hot tears coursed freely down her cheeks, “what shall I do? He is dying, dying as plain as can be. Nothing on this earth will save him now, and I am so, so wretched.”

Tears were also trickling down old Stirrup's own rugged weatherbeaten cheeks, for in his heart he knew she did but speak truth, and it was impossible to contradict the statement. He tried to reply, but broke down hopelessly.

“King Olaf! my darling, my own beautiful and courageous darling,” sobbed Kate,

who, alone with Stirrup, was not ashamed to give full utterance to her grief. "I do not even dare beg you to forgive me my worse than folly, for if it had not been for me, this w—would never have happened—I ought never to have asked you to jump such a place. It was m—m—madness, downright cruelty on my part. I see it now—that it is too—too l—late. And yet," with a fresh burst of sorrow, "I shall live on, very likely for years, and years, and years, and ne—ne—never see you again, or talk to you—or—or love you. Oh! King Olaf! I *cannot* bear it! I wish I were going to die too, and we might both lie under the ground together. We have been such good friends, and understood each other's ways so well—and then—to think—that it is I, I—your mistress—who have killed you! If I had only known—if I could put things back again as they were—I would willingly lose my right hand. But th—things never c—can be put back again, and you—you are dying. Oh! what a brute I feel to be sure!"

Her self-condemnation quite overcame old Stirrup, who forgot his own grief for the time being, in trying to assuage hers.

“Don’t ’ee take on so, now don’t ’ee, Miss Kate dear!” he said in much agitation, patting his young mistress paternally on the back, with a kindly but somewhat clumsy attempt at consolation. “It be terr’ble to ’ear you a blaming of yourself for what after hall is but a haccident, and might ’ave ’appened to the most cautious hof riders. Cheer hup, there’s a dear young lady, and try and remember there be has good fish left in the sea has hever come hout of it.”

“Stirrup,” was the indignant reply, as she turned a pair of flashing grey eyes full upon him, “I wonder how you *can* talk to me in such a way, you who ought to know by this time how dearly I love King Olaf. Do you really suppose now, for one second, that I shall ever forget him, that I should ever either *find* or *allow* another to fill his place in my affections? No, the ocean may be vast, and its inmates plentiful, but such a treasure as King Olaf is only met with once in a life time. I shall never meet with his like again, and even if I did he could never be to me as King Olaf has been.”

Poor old Stirrup! He had wished to comfort her in some small degree, and now her

words seemed to rebuke his want of heart. As if *her* love put *his* to shame, and *her* constancy scoffed at *his*. He forgot that at twenty-two misfortunes seemed more cruel, harder to bear, and more unendurable than they do at sixty-five, and that age, in spite of many drawbacks, acquires at least an increased capacity of suffering with patience.

"Hif 'ee would honly eat 'is victuls!" faltered Stirrup, blubbering like a baby. His words inspired Kate with feverish hope.

"Ah!" she cried, "I was nearly forgetting. King Olaf, my beauty!" lifting the basket from the ground. "See, dear old man, I have brought you some grass, some newly cut grass! You will like that surely, for it is fresh from the field. I picked it myself, only this very morning." And she held him out the most enticing looking bit she could find. King Olaf turned his weary eyes upon the dainty morsel. It smelt so sweet and so nice that it recalled the bygone days, when he used to play by the side of his dam, and sniff at such grass as this in youthful disdain. He took the slender green blades in his mouth, and with an effort contrived to swallow a few. The last food that should

pass his lips, he would take from the hand of her he knew and loved so well. Kate felt encouraged to empty the contents of the basket into the manger, but alas ! King Olaf's fleeting appetite was already appeased, the grass had apparently lost all charm, he turned it over fancifully, and then drooped his heavy head as heretofore. It seemed to Kate as if she were bidding her gallant favourite a last farewell, and she could not tear herself away from his side. She stayed over an hour, talking to the horse, rubbing his poor cold ears, and lavishing endearing epithets upon him. At last, however, she was forced to depart.

"Good-bye, King Olaf," she said sadly. "Good-bye, I will come to see you again to-morrow."

To-morrow ? Even as she uttered the word she felt it to be a mockery, felt that there might never exist one for him, that he might not live ever again to see the rising sun streak the morning horizon, with gleams of growing light, to hear the sweet note of the cuckoo in the distant coppice, the bay of the hounds, the rustle of the falling leaves, or to feel the free fresh air playing on his forehead.

Her heart felt sore within her. It ached at the prospect of losing this dearly loved friend and tried companion. And if souls be denied dumb animals, may it not safely be asserted that their affinity to human beings is great? that their instincts and affections are identical, prompted by the same desires, the same longings, the same passions? Now, as Kate lingered at the door, feeling curiously reluctant to shut him out from her eyes, King Olaf, as if conscious this would be good-bye for ever, turned in his box, and with feeble, faltering steps, essayed to totter towards her. She gave him one passionate kiss, lifted his beautiful muzzle to her lips, then hurried away, overcome with despairing grief and regret, feeling this loss to be almost heavier than she could bear.

* * * * *

The clock had struck ten. Mary Whitbread was sitting in an arm chair by the drawing-room fire, placidly knitting a pair of socks, while Kate was playing one of Beethoven's mournful minor symphonies on the piano. The notes, under her pliant touch, sent forth a plaintive music, which rose and

fell in irregular cadence, sounding almost like the wail of a human voice. Presently she shut up the lid of the instrument with a bang, and began pacing restlessly up and down the room.

"I don't know what is the matter with me to-night," she said. "I don't feel as if I could settle to anything."

"You're fretting about poor King Olaf, Kate, and no wonder!" replied Mary sympathetically. "You've been making that piano cry for the last half hour, but you really ought to be going to bed. It's high time for both of us to retire."

"What's the use of going to bed when you can't sleep?" sighed Kate. "I know nothing more horrible than lying awake hour after hour, tormented by thoughts you can't get rid of. You go, Mary, and I'll come by-and-bye."

"By-and-bye, Kate? How long does that mean?"

"Only a few minutes. I promise not to be long."

Mary folded up her knitting, stuck the needles carefully into her ball of wool, gave Kate a kiss and departed. The latter drew

up the blind, pressed her burning forehead against the cool window sill, and looked out on the still night. Everything seemed so quiet and peaceful, everything except herself, and she was filled with a bitter and rebellious sorrow, impossible to conquer. Was it true that animals had no future life? Would she never meet King Olaf again? Would his beautiful body simply lie under the earth until the worms had fulfilled their loathsome task? She shuddered at the thought. It was so utterly repugnant to her youthful spirit. She almost envied the Red Indian, who, when the shades of death were gathering round him, looked forward to an indefinite existence in a happy hunting ground, with his favourite war-horse by his side. Her meditations were suddenly brought to an abrupt conclusion by the unusual sound of footsteps crunching the gravel just outside. A swift and certain instinct told her King Olaf's end had come. She flew to open the hall door, and hear Stirrup's account of the horse's last moments.

"Stirrup," she cried in a tremulous voice, "are you there?"

"It is not Stirrup, it is I." And then by

the flickering light, she saw Colonel Clinker standing before her in riding apparel.

"I hope I have not frightened you," he said, as she gave a little start of surprise. "Stirrup could not get away quite so soon. I must apologise for disturbing you at this hour of the night, but after dinner I took it into my head to ride over to Silverstone, and bring you the latest news."

"And you," she said, overcome by this last proof of his kindness, "have been out hunting all day long, and must be very tired?"

"Tired? I am never tired, but I want to tell you about"—He hesitated, hardly knowing, now it had come to the point, how to convey the sad intelligence. But she knew it already, realized in full what had happened, and for what purpose he was there.

"I know," she said drearily. "He is dead, and I have been his murderer."

There was a hopeless, cold tone in her voice which touched him to the quick.

"Why should you accuse yourself so harshly? It is not right. No one can prevent accidents happening. You might just as well blame me for having broken down

poor Snowflake. These things can't be helped, much as we may grieve at them when they do occur."

"But then Snowflake is alive; he did not die. That makes all the difference."

"Do you think so? For my part I would sooner a quick, even though painful death, than a life of lingering misery. King Olaf died this evening at eight o'clock. He passed away without a struggle, quietly and peacefully. Stirrup said he grew gradually weaker until his legs could no longer support the weight of his body; then he lay gently down on the straw, stretched himself out full length, and when Stirrup went to look at him he thought at first the horse had gone to sleep."

"A long, long sleep," she murmured, "with never an awakening."

Then all at once the flood-gates of her sorrow broke loose, and she burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

Jack Clinker had braved a good many dangers in his day, but the sight of a woman's tears was one that all his life he never could withstand.

"Hush!" he said tenderly. "Do not cry

so. I cannot bear to see you suffer. Try and think that it is well with King Olaf, and that his physical pains are at an end. He was a noble fellow, but he met his death honourably, like some brave soldier in the field of battle. You should not grieve too much. In a few years' time he might have grown old and decrepit, and to outlive affection and regret is infinitely worse than death."

"I know, I know," she said, hastily drying her eyes. "I try and tell myself the very selfsame things, but I can't reason or theorize at present. It may be horribly selfish, but I can only think of my loss and my grief."

"Not selfish, but loving and true as a woman should be," he answered reverently. "I have brought you these," taking a parcel from the pocket of his great coat. "They are King Olaf's hoofs. I thought you would like to have them."

She did not even look at them. She could not trust herself to do so. It was so dreadful to know that never again in this life would those four trusty, willing feet carry her over hill and dale, or bound across the breezy pastures.

"Oh!" she cried wildly, "what shall I do, what shall I do without him?"

"Kate," he said, with soft persuasion, "listen to me. It is difficult for the new ever to replace the old, but Opal is a good mare, none better was ever foaled. Will you take her instead of King Olaf—take her as a free gift from me, and in course of time learn to value her as she deserves?"

"What! Rob you of your dearest possession, of the animal you declared you never would part with, not even if you went abroad?"

"I would not do so lightly, but in giving her to you I know she will find a mistress worthy of her."

"And what would you think of *me* if I accepted such a sacrifice?"

"I should think you were conferring a very high favour, and that, so far as I am concerned, there was no sacrifice whatever. Giving to a person one lo—I mean that one likes"—hastily correcting the expression—"is exactly the same thing as giving to one's self."

The clear dark-blue sky, lit up by hundreds and thousands of radiant stars, spread

like a vast canopy over their heads ; the big, soft moon shone down upon them, turning into silver all the fields, while the trees stood out in delicate black tracery against the transparent clouds, and the frosty night air kissed their brows as they stood together under the red brick porch. The heart of the man beat fast. He longed so to comfort her, to take her in his arms and speak of a love which would endeavour to soften every grief, to chase away dull care. Perhaps he was not altogether like most of his sex, for a curious instinct of chivalry bid him take no mean advantage of her distress, not to profit by it to urge his own suit, but rather to postpone the telling of it to some later day, when she might better listen to the tale, and when it could cause no fresh agitation or renewed grief. Her heart, too, was stirred to its very depths, stirred by King Olaf's death, but still more stirred by his generous offer. Our opportunities come, but, alack ! we fail to recognise them, and they pass away. Had he only spoken then she surely would have yielded, would have confessed that his love was returned, that she cared for him more than for anyone in this world. But the golden

moment slipped by, and once more with a powerful effort he controlled any expression of his feelings. She stood nervously plucking at the broad shining ivy leaves growing up the porch, pulling them to pieces beneath the hasty twitching of her trembling fingers. A crisis in her life had come, and she at last realised the fact.

"How good you are to me!" she said after a silence, during which on either side "thought had leapt out to wed itself with thought." "You will not even let me thank you."

For one moment he allowed his eyes to rest on the sweet downcast face, with its soft contour and long dark lashes; then with a passionate longing he seized and wrung her hand.

"I would do anything in the world for you," he said in a hoarse whisper. "There is nothing in this wide world that you can ask of me that I would not try and do for your sake."

Without another word, or giving her time to make any reply, he turned swiftly away, and vanished down the winding drive.

She stood with parted lips and glistening

eyes listening, listening until the last sound of his footsteps had ceased. She looked at the moon, and the stars, and the still night like a living statue. But the first bitterness of King Olaf's death was softened; Jack Clinker's sympathy had blunted the keen edge of it, and rendered her more patient in endurance. The little threepenny piece hung in its accustomed place. She looked at it and smiled, as if it were indeed some talisman of good. Then when she reached her room she knelt down on her knees and prayed as she had not prayed since her childhood—an innocent, girlish prayer, full of trust and thankfulness.

A great calm had suddenly come upon her, while all the time in her ears rang those few sweet words—

“I would do anything for you; there is nothing in this wide world I would not try and do for your sake.”

She believed in him at last. He had conquered her doubts, overcome her scepticism. And in that belief, though King Olaf lay stiff and stark upon the yellow straw in Farmer Hammond's stable, she felt happier far than she had done for years. So great, truly, is

that power which men call love, and which already was exercising a softening and beneficial influence upon a nature rendered hard and callous by circumstances, but which in itself was womanly, compassionate, and sensitive, and fitted to make the man of its choice truly happy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE day of the Foxington Hunt Ball had arrived, and the little town was crowded to excess. Its hotels and its lodging-houses were crammed with pleasure seekers from different parts of the country, while the usually quiet station presented a most unwonted scene of bustle and activity. Porters trundled heavy trucks, or hoisted portmantaux on their shoulders ; anxious maids stood pointing out the enormous white-initialed trunks belonging to their mistresses, while the one-horse omnibus and capacious but shabby flies did a roaring business. Those who owned country houses had filled their mansions, on this auspicious occasion, with smart dancing men, pretty girls, and professional beauties, whose fame had preceded them, and whom the townspeople were dying to catch a glimpse of ; for the Foxington Ball was considered the best throughout the Midland Counties, and had a high reputation to sustain, which was certainly enhanced by the presence of one or two

fashionable belles. Mothers also, of marriageable daughters, were wont to consider the County Ball a fitting opportunity for youthful *débutantes* to make their entry into the world, prior to encountering a wider arena and larger circle of acquaintances in the Metropolis. Folks, in fact, assembled from far and wide, for in the memory of the most constant frequenters such a word as failure had been unknown in connection with the Foxington Ball, and year after year fresh lustre was added to its reputation for success, smart frocks and good looks. Even the most anti-terpsichorean hunting men, a class who regard such festivities, as a rule, with openly-avowed contempt, though refusing steadily to trip the "light fantastic" in *propria personæ*, graced this gathering with their presence, condescending to fill up the doorways and every available opening, lounging in odd corners (where they discussed the latest hunting news as eagerly as they would have done seated in their own easy chairs, in smoking suits and slippers), forming picturesque wall-ornaments, whose vivid scarlet coats stood out in striking contrast against the white mural decorations. Portly

squires with jovial faces, savouring of port wine, and rotund waistcoats, suggestive of many an ample meal, meeting at this particular Ball, button-holed each other, out of pure good fellowship, and retiring into the supper room, grew almost witty and highly conversational, over the cold chicken and Perrier Jouet, while well-developed matrons, addicted to displaying their charms in a manner more munificent than modest, flirted openly with old beaux of long ago, exchanging compliments and pleasant reminiscences of that happy bygone time. The County Ball was, in fact, *the* great gathering of the year, and as such received the patronage and support of the Huntingshire big wigs, whose presence stamped it in return as a select, fashionable, and highly *élite* assemblage, which, owing to these favourable circumstances, the small fry of airs and graces felt itself justified in patronising, without losing any portion of its local status. . . . Four whole weeks had passed away since that frosty moonlight night on which Jack Clinker had ridden over and broken the news of King Olaf's untimely death to Kate Brewser, and by slow degrees she was beginning to recover from

the shock of that sad event. At first, she not only obstinately avoided the hunting field, but also everything connected with it, steadily refusing either to drive or ride to the meets; but recently, Stirrup had so often and so urgently implored her to make a fresh start, that at length she yielded to his solicitations, and having once fairly broken the ice, and enjoyed "a real good thing," during which the Duckling had acquitted himself brilliantly, she took to the pleasures of the chase once more, with an ardour enhanced rather than diminished by her temporary retirement from the ranks. She could never forget King Olaf, but the love of sport was too strong within her ever to be quelled, even by serious misfortune.

During all this space of time she had not seen Colonel Clinker once, and though at first sight this may appear strange, the reason was simple enough, for he had left Foxington. On the very morning after he had paid that nocturnal visit to Sport Lodge, he had received a telegram from the housekeeper at Nevis, informing him of the sudden and alarming illness of his father, and requesting his immediate presence. Conse-

quently he had set out for the North, without a minute's delay, and without finding time to wish good-bye to Kate. In fact, she remained unaware of his absence for a few days, until informed of it by Mr. McGrath, although in the interval she had secretly wondered at his non-appearance.

"I had a letter from Jack this morning. He desires to be remembered to you," said Mr. McGrath, one day when he happened to meet her walking alone in the town. "He tells me the old gentleman is quite out of danger."

"The old gentleman?" echoed she. "What old gentleman?"

"Don't you know? Why Lord Nevis, of course. He had a fit of apoplexy, and they thought at first he was a 'gone coon.'"

"Is Colonel Clinker away from home, then?" She was glad to find there had been some excuse, after all, for his apparent neglect.

"Dear me! yes. Why he left on Friday. The housekeeper telegraphed to Jack to come at once if he wished to find Lord Nevis alive; so he stuffed a few clothes into a portmanteau, and went off there and then."

“ And Lord Nevis, you say, is better ? ”

“ Very much, according to Jack—become quite sensible and knows them all. Jack won’t like losing his hunting much, I expect, there’s none to be had up there, you know. It’s a very wild, dreary sort of place this time of year, though pleasant enough in summer.”

“ Perhaps he will come back again soon ? ” she suggested.

“ I expect he will. Jack’s uncommon fond of his old governor, but a great hulking fellow hanging about in a sick room can do no earthly good. He is only in the way. However, I dare say I shall hear how things progress in the course of a day or two.”

But as time went on Lord Nevis improved, and with no ostensible reason for prolonging his stay, Colonel Clinker did not return to the Retreat.

Mr. McGrath grew so uneasy in his mind, that he felt he must make a confidant of Kate, whose sympathies he knew he could rely upon. “ You know, Miss Brewster,” he said to her, when another week had elapsed, “ it’s really very odd ; I can’t make it out at all, and would give a pony to know what that fellow Jack is about all this while.

Every time he writes he says his father is better, and yet he never talks of coming home."

"I suppose he can't leave him!" said Kate.

"Then why the deuce does he not say so?"

"Because he probably thinks you take it for granted."

"It's a shame," continued Mr. McGrath, waxing warm. "There am I, left with all those cursed bills coming pouring in, and not knowing what on earth to do with them. 'Send my letters on Terry, old man,' says Jack, 'but open all the blue ones and chuck them into the fire.' I wish to goodness I had done what I was told from the first, but some scruples of conscience prevented my doing so, and now the wretched things are piled up literally a yard high. Nobody but Jack could stand such a state of affairs and still show a cheery front to the enemy. He's a most undefeated sportsman."

"Has he ever said anything to you lately, Mr. McGrath, about going away?"

"Oh! Jack's always talking of hooking it. I've grown accustomed to that threat, and it fails to disturb my equanimity any

longer. Gad! Miss Brewser, but I've graver reasons for disquietude just at present. I can put two and two together as well as most people, and when Jack stays on at Nevis, with a stud of horses here eating their heads off, I say there's something behind the scenes." And Mr. McGrath pursed up his fat, flabby little lips, with an air of exceeding mystery and importance.

"But, Mr. McGrath," objected Kate, "don't you think nothing could be more natural than a son stopping with a father who is ill? Why do you entertain any suspicions on the subject?" She was far too loyal in her affections not to defend the absent, whatever doubts she herself might entertain, and although all sorts of far-fetched speculations filled her brain she did not choose to divulge them to her companion.

"Can you keep a secret?" asked Mr. McGrath suddenly.

"I hope so," she answered with a ready curiosity. "At all events I'll promise to try. What is it?"

"You swear not to let it go any farther? Jack would be in an awful rage if he knew I had said anything about it."

"Then perhaps you had better not tell me. I'd rather you did nothing to vex him, especially now he happens to be away."

"Faith! Miss Brewster, but the fact of the matter is, I don't feel as if I *could* keep it to myself; besides, you're to be trusted, so here goes. You must know," lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "that Lord Nevis is most anxious for his son to marry"—

"Well, there's nothing so wonderful in that," interrupted Kate.

"Yes, but listen. It must be someone with money. Jack can't possibly commit matrimony without. Well, there's a girl up there, a Miss Paton—ah, I see you begin to look interested at last!"

"Yes, yes, go on."

"There's a girl up there, as I said before, who has fallen head over ears in love with Jack. It's really quite pitiable to watch the poor thing."

"What's the girl's name?"

"Polly Paton—Miss Polly Paton, of Poole-rorie."

"And Colonel Clinker? Does he respond?"

"Ah, that's just where it is. I don't believe, between you and me and the post, that Jack cares a bit about her."

"Then what, may I ask, do you fear, and even if Colonel Clinker were fond of this—this Miss Paton, since she has money, why should you object?" Her voice sounded a trifle hard in her own ears, but Mr. McGrath's powers of observation were not sufficiently acute to notice it.

"She's a silly, foolish little thing," he said, "not worthy of Jack in any way. You see, Miss Brewster, Jack's such an infernal easy-going, good-hearted fellow, he wants a girl with her head on her shoulders, one who could exercise a certain influence over him."

"And would not Miss Paton do so?"

"Never; she's not the sort of girl. All the same, I should not be the least surprised if she has been setting her cap at Jack; he's very soft where women are concerned, can't bear to give them pain, or say an unkind word, and just to please his father he might drift into an engagement out of pity. Don't you understand?" It was seldom Mr. McGrath spoke so seriously on any subject,

but now he was evidently greatly in earnest, while it never seemed to enter his mind for one moment that it was just possible he had lacked discrimination in the choice of a *confidante*. But Kate, though every word stabbed her to the heart, was not one to allow others to guess at her emotions. She was, fortunately for herself, endowed with a large share of self-control, and carried on the conversation with an outward appearance of calm, which effectually succeeded in deceiving her companion and putting him off the right scent.

"I did not give Colonel Clinker credit for being so pliable," she said. "He never struck me as being one of those men whom a woman can twist round her little finger. However, of course you know him better than I do."

"Gad," returned Terry; "where there's a girl in question, and a pretty one into the bargain, it takes a very strong man to resist. It flatters a fellow's vanity to know that some girl is awfully in love with him, even if he don't care two straws about her. I'm not sure," musingly, "that I might not even get led away myself under similar circumstances."

"Oh! the girl is pretty is she? That makes a difference of course."

"All the difference. If she were ugly the danger would be reduced to a minimum; besides, Jack don't care for ugly women; never did."

"He's a sad flirt I'm afraid Mr. McGrath?"

"Oh! I don't know about that. All men are pretty much the same."

"Are they? Then I'm sorry for them."

"They don't require much pity, Miss Brewer. They manage to jog along tolerably comfortably on the whole."

"I *detest* flirty men," said Kate, pursuing her own train of thought.

"Do you mean to say by that that you detest Jack?" asked Mr. McGrath, opening his dark eyes in surprise.

"I don't feel myself called upon to express any opinion one way or the other on *your friend* Colonel Clinker," she replied coldly, and then for the first time it began vaguely to dawn upon Mr. McGrath's abstruse comprehension that he had somehow put his foot in it, and signally failed to advance a cause he was conscious of secretly advocating.

The conversation came to an abrupt termination, neither was it revived at any future period, Kate seemingly steadily avoiding all mention of Colonel Clinker's name, and refusing to be inveigled into any future discussion.

Nevertheless, Mr. McGrath's words made a deep impression, which as each day went by became more permanent. What a fool she had been to be sure, and what a mercy that she had been saved from committing any crowning act of folly. The scale had dropped from her eyes and she could now see things in their true light. Colonel Clinker did not care for her, *had* never cared for her, else he would never have gone away like this and remained. Perhaps he might even be staying on purpose. Mr. McGrath had said his heart was kind, that he could not bear to give a woman pain, and he had guessed how fond she was of him, and left Foxington out of pity—pity for *her*. To a high-spirited, proud girl like Kate the very idea was torture. She had been mistaken in fancying his attentions meant anything; they were merely the civilities of a man whose powers of flirtation were already well

known, and to think that she, Kate Brewer, had fallen a victim to his fascinations. The little seed of jealousy sown by Mr. McGrath's unconscious hand grew and grew, until it darkened all her mental vision, and each fresh speculation and assumption became more bitter and improbable. Perhaps at that very moment Colonel Clinker was amusing himself with Miss Polly Paton, basking in the sunshine of Miss Polly Paton's smiles, and telling Miss Polly Paton that "there was nothing in the world he would not try and do for her sweet sake." She hated her with a fierce hatred, of which a week ago she could not have believed herself capable. She was glad she was a weak, stupid little creature; that at least was some small comfort in her cup of bitterness; but then on the other hand, she was pretty, Mr. McGrath had distinctly said so, and men would do anything for a pretty face, while she herself could lay no claims to beauty. She looked in the glass. No! She had good eyes, good hair, and a good complexion, but her nose was awful, and her mouth like a cavern. So she told herself, trying hard to maintain a strict impartiality, to exaggerate nothing, to

conceal nothing. She had no recommendation whatever, save her money and lack of relatives, and if Colonel Clinker ever by any chance did happen to propose—if things went wrong with Miss Polly Paton, or the settlements were not so good as he expected—and he fell back upon her as a *pisaller*, a last resource, she would know how to appreciate his conduct at its proper value. Then she remembered, regretfully, how once or twice he had called her Kate, taken her hand in his, how she had even allowed him to detain it unnecessarily, and once—yes, once—that night when he had told her of King Olaf's death, she had actually returned its pressure. A burning blush rose to her brow. He might have thought she was running after him—to use Mr. McGrath's expression, "setting her cap at him," and here all her pride rose up in arms. If he did return to Foxington at any future period she would at least take care to make him alter *that* opinion—to let him know he was as indifferent to her as she apparently was to him. She felt herself growing harder and colder, and rejoiced at the fact, though all the time her heart within her ached sorely,

and sank at this sudden blighting of its joy, this cruel frustration of its hopes.

Kate, perhaps, may seem silly to many, yet there are others who can enter into and sympathise with a state of feeling brought about by intermingled love and jealousy. The feminine nature is passionate and sensitive, but at times wholly unreasoning, and Kate fast argued herself into a hostile condition, in which she was prepared to meet Colonel Clinker as a stranger and a foe.

Would all this animosity fade away when they met, like a mirage in the desert, like snow in the sunshine, or would it lead to grave results? She never paused to consider. Each hour of his absence only formed a fresh link in the chain of undisputable facts against him.

And now the day of the Foxington Hunt Ball had arrived, and he was coming back to be present at it, having torn himself away from the charms of Miss Polly Paton's society, and overcome his filial anxieties for the time being. But she would greet him very coldly, she would not allow him to imagine for one second that she was glad of his return, that she had longed for a sight of his face, or the

sound of his voice. That folly was over and done with, kept firmly in abeyance by a strong and insulted pride. Yet with characteristic contradiction she appeared in a diaphanous costume of white tulle, with a single row of pearls round her neck, and her hair dressed small and neat to the head, because once, months ago, when they had first met, he had told her that he thought "women looked to better advantage so than in any other way, save, perhaps, a riding habit." It certainly seemed odd she should remember this now, when his opinions had become a matter of complete indifference, and still more odd that she should view her reflection in the glass with a feeling of triumph, and a sudden feminine assumption that Miss Polly Paton might not have, probably *had* not, a good figure, and that Colonel Clinker said he placed this attribute far before a pretty face. Kate's arms and neck were white and rounded like polished alabaster; perhaps Miss Polly's were red, mottled, and countrified. There was some satisfaction to be derived from the thought. And now that the time had arrived when she was to see him again her heart relented a

little. It was just possible that she might have judged him too hastily, that there might exist some extenuating circumstances. She would listen to him at any rate, hear what he had to say, and yes—if he asked her—dance with him once or twice. She would not admit even to herself that the soul-hunger of love was upon her; but so it was all the same, although she disputed the fact cleverly, under a variety of different pretexts highly creditable to her imagination.

The two girls had persuaded Mrs. Tryon to run down from town on a few days' visit, and once again fulfil the rôle of *chaperone*. Mrs. Forrester, whom they first besought, regarded all such frivolous amusements with unmitigated contempt. "No," she declared; "had it been a good sale, a horse show, or even a travelling circus, I would have escorted you, my dears, with pleasure, but a ball I really can't, much as I should like to oblige. Such festivities are quite out of my line."

The Sport Lodge party arrived early on the scene, determined to derive all the enjoyment possible from the evening's amusement. Mary Whitbread was in a state of

absolute beatitude, for a couple of hours previously a magnificent bouquet, quite bridal in its virgin spotlessness and purity of colour, had arrived in a wooden box, with her name written on the cardboard label in large letters, and although the giver maintained a strict incognito, she recognised the handwriting as belonging to no less a person than Mr. Grahame. She carried it aloft now, with a flush of happiness tinging her pale cheeks, which made her in her black ball dress look positively pretty.

The ball itself was held in a large and lofty room, specially set apart every year for the purpose, belonging to the enterprising proprietress of the Rest and be Thankful Hotel. The walls were gaily decorated with scarlet and white draperies, festoons of flowers, and a vast array of wax candles, while the red coats of the men and the bright costumes of the ladies added additional colour and cheerfulness to the scene. The room was comparatively empty yet, and the smooth shining boards looked very inviting, while the musicians sat tuning their instruments or idly turning over the pages of the dance music about to be played. Somewhat

to Kate's surprise, she almost immediately stumbled upon an old friend and admirer in Captain Fitzgerald, whom she had not met since last season in town, and who, with a strawberry-cream carnation in his button-hole, the very latest thing in collars, and an extremely immaculate shirt front, fully maintained his reputation as an exquisite of the first water. At the present moment he evidently regarded himself most cruelly insulted by being dragged to a country ball at such a ridiculously early hour. He was standing lolling up against the doorway, stroking the ends of his long, silky, flaxen moustache, with an air of unmistakable boredom on his vapid but well-cut features. They assumed an unwonted animation, however, on Kate's appearance, and, advancing hastily towards her with an *empressement* as complimentary as it was unusual in so *blasé* and accomplished a lady-killer, he said—

“Aw! really now, Miss Brewsaw, this *is* a pleasaw,” shaking hands effusively, “though not, perhaps, altogether an unexpected one, as I thought I should most likely see you here to-night. Awfully jolly meeting an old friend in this sort of way, ain't it?”

Captain Fitzgerald edged insinuatingly to her side as he spoke. He was a fragile-looking man, of diminutive height, but what he lacked in physical stature he apparently made up for in self-esteem.

"Yes," answered Kate, with an irrepressible smile, "awfully jolly. Quite a pleasant surprise indeed, at least so far as I am concerned."

"Aw! now, you know, Miss Brewsaw! You're too flattering. I only wish a fellar could believe what you say, but you were always up to some kind of chaff."

"Chaff! Captain Fitzgerald? I never was more serious in my life."

His vanity was not proof against this assertion. He beamed with self-satisfaction, and said sentimentally—

"I really began to think I was nevaw going to see you again. It seems such an age since we met!"

"Yes," said she with brutal *sang froid* devoid an atom of answering romance, "not since we used to sit under the trees last season in Rotten Row, comment upon the fashions, and arrive at the conclusion, Captain Fitzgerald was the best dressed man in

London. I remember. Why I can even recall the pattern of that dear little blue and white scarf you used to wear."

"Aw! those were indeed happy days," said he, heaving a languishing sigh. "Do you evaw think of them I wonder, Miss Brewsaw?"

"Have I not just told you so, or do you wish me to enumerate the number and colour of your coats? Let me see, there was a brown one, and a grey one, and a black one, and a rather æsthetic, but very choice, dark green"—

"What a memory you have got to be sure," interrupted he admiringly. "I assure you, Miss Brewsaw, I often look back to those jolly days, and wish it were possible to recall the past."

"A very pernicious practice, Captain Fitzgerald, and a most foolish and unprofitable one. It would be far better to turn your attention to the present."

This was the first opening she had given him, and he was not slow to profit by it.

"That's what I intend doing," he said blandly. "In fact that's what I came here to-night for. 'Faint heart,' you know the rest."

Kate gave a little mischievous laugh. She felt no compunction in teasing so universal an admirer.

Her mirth appeared to nettle him somewhat, for he drew himself up with an injured air and said—

“’Pon my word now, Miss Brewsaw, you are too bad; you really are! I never met anyone so unsentimental in all my days.”

“What! because, luckily for my peace of mind, I can afford to look back upon our Rotten Row experiences with tolerable equanimity? You are *exigeant*, to say the least of it.”

She was in a bitter, mocking humour to-night.

“Just the same as evaw I see,” returned Captain Fitzgerald, quite undaunted by the off-hand manner in which she received his attentions. “Practical and charming, full of life, but, alas! no heart.”

“No, no heart,” she answered decidedly. “Certainly not. Hearts in the nineteenth century have gone to the wall altogether. The great god, money, has usurped their place, and people find the comforts and luxuries of life a very convenient substitute.”

He looked at her with rather a conscious and disturbed expression, as if her speech had been specially directed against himself.

"You have a way of saying things now and again, Miss Brewsaw, calculated to make a fellar feel awfully small," he said, twirling his moustache uneasily. "Fellars don't like it, you know."

"No," with a mocking glance. "*Fellars* never do like home truths. But tell me, Captain Fitzgerald—just as between friends—do you *evaw* feel 'awfully small?'"

He was one of those sort of men who inspired her with no respect whatever. She could not help saying pert things to him, they came so naturally. He coloured a little, and said not without a certain amount of heat—

"Dash it all! That's hardly a fair question? You can't expect me to confess my own weaknesses, even to you Miss Brewsaw?"

"Have you got any?"

"Aw! now, come, you know. I really wish you'd drop it."

"Drop it? Drop what?" she asked innocently.

"Oh! all that chaff. Let's try and talk sense."

"By all means, Captain Fitzgerald. Will you begin?"

"There now! You're at it again worse than evaw."

"Dear me! You're terribly hard to please to-night. I did not know you were so huffy, and had developed this new phase of character."

He began to feel irritated by the persistent levity of her responses.

"And if I am huffy," he said warmly, "are you not enough to make me so?"

"I humbly beg pardon. I was not aware you possessed so sensitive a nature."

This was too much.

"You *must* know," he answered, "how greatly I value and esteem your good opinion."

She turned her head away, opening and shutting her fan with nervous impatience. She looked back now with astonishment to a time when she had considered this empty-headed, conceited little man, rather good fun than otherwise, and when his vapid speeches had created a certain amount of amusement.

Insensibly she found herself making mental comparisons between Captain Fitzgerald's small, fragile form and the sturdy, upright one of somebody else; somebody else whom she was watching for and waiting for with ever-increasing anxiety, and whose non-appearance effectually prevented her from enjoying the present situation. Where could he be? Why had he not come? Had he changed his mind at the last moment, and remained by Miss Polly Paton's side? She was hardly conscious that Captain Fitzgerald had shifted his position and was scanning her features critically.

"A penny for your thoughts," he exclaimed after a prolonged pause.

She started and blushed up to the very roots of her hair.

"They are too trivial to be worth telling," she answered lightly; then, as the music struck up, and the strains of an enlivening waltz rang through the room, she added—"Let us have a dance instead. If I remember nothing else, at least I remember how beautifully you can pirouette."

A compliment from *her* was quite sufficient to restore him to good-humour, for if he was

tain he was at the same time as easy to please and to soothe as a child. In this instance he also knew Kate Brewser's praise to be sincere, for Captain Fitzgerald was one of those pampered darlings who are asked everywhere, and know fashionable young women by the score simply on account of the adorable way in which they trip over the smooth polished boards of a ball room. Girls when *they* danced with him were conscious of looking their very best, he held them so well, neither necessitating a forward drooping of the neck, produced by an embarrassingly firm clasp or a stand-off let-me-alone sort of bearing, the results of a not sufficiently supporting arm round the waist. His step was perfection, smooth, rythmical, and gliding, he kept his chest thrown out, though in no ways disagreeably inflated, his left arm cleaved the air in a graceful circle, his carriage was simply faultless, and altogether Captain Fitzgerald was a distinguished specimen of the model dancing man—a man who, like the solitary owl, turns night into day, and only begins to wake up thoroughly about the midnight hours.

When the waltz came to an end he said to Kate—

“Is your card quite full, Miss Brewsaw? That was perfectly divine, and I want to make sure of another waltz or two before you have given them all away.”

“I am not engaged at all at present,” she said honestly.

“What luck for me! Well, first come first served; I shall be awfully greedy and take advantage of the situation.”

He was as good as his word, for he took her card from her and filled in his name for every single waltz throughout the evening. Kate just glanced at it when he returned it into her possession.

“Oh!” she said coolly, “though flattering to my vanity, this will never do. You have sacrificed yourself altogether, and I should have every young lady in the room tearing out my eyes with envy and hatred if I were to monopolize their pet dancer entirely. There,” drawing her pencil through the names, “I have left you numbers seven and twelve.”

“And is that to be all? No more, when I have travelled a hundred miles to catch a glimpse of you.”

“ Well, we will see later on.”

She had no intention of engaging herself formally throughout the evening until Colonel Clinker arrived. She would wait and take the initiative from him. If he were to ask her to dance and she had not one left to give him, then she might feel sorry. There was lots of time yet, and if when he came she elected to prove to him that two could play at the game of flirtation, that her feelings were not seriously involved, and that she had borne his departure with tolerable equanimity, why, then, she had only, as she knew, to lift up her little finger for Captain Fitzgerald to rush to her feet. She did not care twopence about him; but if Colonel Clinker behaved badly he would do as well as anybody else to pass the weary hours of the evening with. Thus thinking, she chatted away very civilly, so that on her return to Mrs. Tryon Captain Fitzgerald took up a position close to the door way, from whence he devoured her with his eyes until a fresh partner came up and carried her off in triumph. She was a favourite with the men, and never sat out very long at a time. But though she danced with the merriest, a close observer might

have noticed a certain watchful expectancy of glance and manner which rendered her gaiety forced, her enjoyment only assumed. For as the minutes passed she kept on thinking, "Oh! if he had cared for me in the very least he would have come! No doubt he hates balls, considers them a bore and a nuisance—most hunting mendo—and will only turn up for an hour about supper time; just say how do you do, and go off again. I wish to goodness I had never come to this wretched place—that I had never set eyes upon him; at least I was happy and light-hearted then in a way; and now my life seems all at an end, and nothing left worth caring for." Poor Kate! she watched, and wearied, and waited till she grew sick at heart and faint with deferred hope till number twelve came round, and Captain Fitzgerald for the third time appeared to claim her.

"What an awfully jolly ball this is to be shuaw!" he said with unusual enthusiasm. "Good floor, good music, and"—squeezing her waist significantly, "good partners. What more can a fellar wish for?"

"Yes, awfully jolly," she said drearily, though her whole face belied the words, for

the light had died out of the beautiful grey eyes, leaving them cold and weary, and the full lips were pressed tightly together with an expression of inward suffering, luckily lost upon Captain Fitzgerald, who, warmed from the exercise of dancing and frequent draughts of champagne, felt in that elated spirit when the small troubles of others are apt to make but a very slight impression, even if they make any impression at all. He and Kate twirled smoothly round together, their steps, if not their thoughts, being in perfect unison, while Captain Fitzgerald glowed and beamed under the joy of feeling the girl he imagined himself to be in love with so close to him, and meditated, directly the band left off that very charming part of Waldteufel's new waltz and relapsed into a less terpsichorean inspiring strain, avowing for the fourth time the hopeless passion under which he laboured; and Kate, looking charming in her fresh white dress, bowed her head every now and again in stately assent to his frivolous small talk, too utterly wretched to plunge into argument or bandy unnecessary words. Suddenly her heart gave a great leap, and then stood perfectly still,

for there just opposite, watching her every movement with a pair of keen and somewhat discontented-looking blue eyes, stood Colonel Clinker quite alone among the panting couples, pausing after their evolutions. Now was the moment to carry her proud intentions into execution and conceal the pleasure and the relief she felt at once more seeing him again. She waited until Captain Fitzgerald came to a halt, and then gave Colonel Clinker a careless little nod of recognition, much the same as she would have vouchsafed to the most casual acquaintance. It was sufficient, however, to bring him to her side immediately. The honest, open countenance looked genuinely rejoiced at the meeting, but she, anticipating any salutations on his part, said coolly and with a carefully assumed indifference only too well calculated to deceive—

“How awfully late you are! Your friends began to think you were never going to turn up; however, I suppose you despise these sort of entertainments and only put in an appearance as a matter of duty.”

It was hardly the sort of greeting he had pictured to himself all through the long

hours of the night and day, when, being whirled through the air at a rapid rate, his thoughts had been filled with her image—her image as it remained graven on his mind—white, sweet, tearful, and womanly as she stood under the red brick porch and the moonbeams played on her pale, sorrowful face. He had fancied a very different welcome to this, and such a reception filled him with pained surprise. He was not deficient in perceptive powers, and the very tone of her voice sufficed to show that during his absence some mysterious change had taken place in her manner towards him. What had he done to offend her? And if he had offended her, how could he best apologise and set matters straight. This was the idea that flashed across his brain immediately. Astonishment and disappointment prevented him at first from replying to her question. And she, inwardly rejoicing at the effect her words had produced, repeated in a little dictatorial manner, as if she had a right to know the reason—

“Well! What made you so late? Laziness, pleasant society, or somnolence?”

She acted her part admirably, for in such an encounter the woman always fares best and hides her feelings the most successfully. Men are more honest, or perhaps more clumsy in deception, but now she was waiting, expecting some reply.

"No," he said; "you are quite wrong, neither laziness, pleasant society, nor *post-prandial* somnolence had anything to do with it."

"What had then? may I ask."

"A regular chapter of accidents, as provoking as it was unfortunate. To begin with, I only arrived from Scotland this afternoon instead of in the morning, for we were delayed several hours on the road by something going wrong with the engine, and were shunted into a little country station, where we had to remain an indefinite time, kicking our heels about, bawling to the guard, putting our heads out of the window, and, as a last resource, strutting up and down the platform."

"Hum!" said she sarcastically; "rather a trying ordeal to the temper; did yours suffer much in consequence, or are you one of those placid individuals who never allow trivial

outside affairs to ruffle the even tenor of their ways ?”

“To be honest, I suppose I cursed and swore with the rest. But I have not told half my adventures yet. As ill-luck would have it, when I finally reached Foxington Station, the very first person I met was our old Earl who insisted on my going to dine at the Castle this evening. It was an awful bore ; I did not want to accept, as you can imagine, but they had a large dinner party, one of their number had thrown them over at the last moment, and Lord Huntingshire asked me in such a way that it was impossible to refuse.”

“I’ve no doubt you enjoyed yourself immensely.”

“Did I though ? It was one of the regular Huntingshire stately, ponderous, and ceremonious parties, composed of a few swells, a bishop, a couple of scientific coveys, and a large sprinkling of the neighbouring clergy. I could not wish my worst enemy a greater infliction.”

“Did you not manage to console yourself with Lady Anne ?” she asked, displaying an irrepressible touch of feminine malice.

"After dinner," continued he, ignoring the question altogether, "we set off for Foxington in the family omnibus. The fates were clearly against me, and fortune's fickle face—like someone else's," looking at Kate, "refused to smile. A pair of jibbing horses was the next difficulty to be overcome; and when we got as far as Mount Hill, you know where I mean, half way between Foxington and the Castle, the brutes refused to stir one step, and came to a dead stop. Here was a pretty dilemma as you can imagine! A carriage full of ball goers balked of their evening's amusement by a couple of restive animals. The driver, to give him his due, whipped, beat, prodded, lashed, swore, threatened and coaxed, but all to no purpose, the beasts remained obdurate and obstinate. At last seeing that we ran a very fair chance of stopping there all night, we men turned out and literally putting our shoulders to the wheel, and a very muddy one into the bargain, succeeded in shoving the vehicle up the ascent by sheer force. I was more fortunate than most of my neighbours, inasmuch that being so close to home, I was able on my arrival to change my clothes, but all

this took time, and, the long and the short of it is, I have only this minute arrived at an exasperatingly late hour."

His explanation was certainly plausible enough so far as it went, but Kate felt that there were still other and graver matters which must be cleared before she could resume her old familiar tone and their intercourse become unconstrained.

"You certainly appear to have been somewhat unfortunate in your experiences," she said, unbending a little.

"Exceedingly so. All I can now do is to console myself with the trite reflection, 'Better late than never.' Have you by any good luck still got such a thing as a dance left to give away, or is my chance a perfectly hopeless one?"

"You can have waltz number fifteen if you like," she answered, controlling her satisfaction with an effort. Then a vision of Miss Polly Paton rose to her mind, and she added proudly, "But pray do not bother yourself about dancing a duty dance with me. We have known each other too well to stand on such empty and unmeaning forms of ceremony."

"Why do you say *have known?*" he asked suspiciously. "Are our relations so much altered as all that?"

"I should think you were the best judge."

"And," he retorted, with rising heat, "do you mean to say you actually believe that I consider dancing with you a *duty dance*?"

"It does not much signify *what* I believe."

"Yes it does; it signifies a great deal. It signifies so much that the only reason why I came here to-night was to claim what you are pleased to call a *duty dance*. Otherwise I should have remained with my father."

Her heart began to beat fast, but she said mockingly—

"I am sorry you should have given yourself so much trouble on my account."

"It's no trouble; it was a pleasure—a far greater one than you suspect."

"Indeed? You are most flattering. I only wish I could believe any portion of the pretty speeches you are good enough to address to me. Unfortunately I am of a sceptical disposition. By-the-bye, I hope Lord Nevis is better?"

“ Yes, thanks. The old governor’s turned the corner, and is in a fair way of recovering.”

“ Do you know that Mr. McGrath was getting very uneasy at your prolonged absence ? In fact, he began to consider you had some good reason for staying away.”

She looked at him with a meaning glance, which seemed to say, “ Ha, ha ! I know all about it.”

He changed colour slightly, and said abruptly—

“ Terry’s a downright donkey. Why the deuce can’t he mind his own business ? What nonsense has he been telling you, pray ? ”

Something in his manner confirmed her suspicions. Either he *did* care for Miss Polly Paton, or else, as Mr. McGrath had said, Miss Polly Paton was desperately in love with him, and he was conscious of the fact.

“ No nonsense at all,” she said sharply. “ And what’s more, it appears to me that Mr. McGrath has a perfect right to express his opinions.”

“ I don’t seem able to do or say anything

right to-night," he answered irritably, for the coolness of her reception, and this allusion to a secret that ought never to have been revealed, annoyed him more than words could tell.

"Perhaps you are less unfortunate when at Nevis," she suggested sarcastically. "By-the-bye, did you enjoy the hunting up there?"

"Hunting? You *must* know perfectly well there is no hunting."

During this conversation Captain Fitzgerald had darted off into the crowd to say "How-do-you-do?" to an elderly marchioness, covered with diamonds, whose parties he was in the habit of frequenting, but now he was returning to finish his waltz with Kate, a bland smile invading every corner of his insignificant features. The opportunity might never recur of shooting so apt an arrow of sarcasm.

"What?" she exclaimed, arching her eyebrows in mock surprise, "not even *fortune-hunting*?"

There was no mistaking the innuendo.

"No," he said angrily, turning away, "not even *fortune-hunting*."

And then she was sorry she had said it—sorry directly he had left her side to have wounded his feelings ; but the thing was done, and Captain Fitzgerald close by impatient to re-commence his dance.

“Who’s that chap ?” he asked, with the animosity of suspected rivalry, directly Colonel Clinker was out of ear-shot.

“Oh ! that ? That’s Colonel Clinker, the great gentleman jockey,” she answered, determined on upholding his proud position to the full.

“Aw ! yes, of course. I thought I knew the fellar’s face. Awful cool hand, ain’t he ?”

“Not that I am aware of. Why do you say so ?”

“Aw ! I don’t know. Seems to think he has only to look at a girl for her to jump down his throat.”

“I have been acquainted with *other* gentlemen, Captain Fitzgerald, who possessed a similar idiosyncrasy, not that I admit it in Colonel Clinker’s case.”

“Aw ! I twig. You like the fellar, then ?”

“You have no right to assume any such

thing, or to speak to me like that," she said with cold dignity.

"Awfully sorry, Miss Brewsaw, to have offended you. Beg pardon."

"Yes, you have offended me very much, Captain Fitzgerald. Please in future abstain from any remarks of a similar nature. Colonel Clinker is a great, a very great friend of mine, and I object to hearing him criticised."

"The devil!" ejaculated Captain Fitzgerald in tones of bitter exasperation at finding himself forestalled. "That's how the land lies, is it? Pray don't expect *me* to congratulate you."

"I don't *want* your congratulations, and what's more, I don't *care* for them," she said indignantly, stung by his impertinence, "and if you ever allude to the subject again we shall quarrel once for all. There is no truth whatever in your assertion, but even if there were people should mind their own business."

Anybody except Captain Fitzgerald would, after such a rebuff, have considered himself effectually snubbed for the rest of the evening, but reproof rolled off the heights of his

self-satisfaction as water rolls from a duck's back or thunder from the meeting clouds. He coughed once or twice, twiddled his moustache assiduously, took a turn, and at the end of it renewed the conversation as cheerfully as if no difference of opinion had ever arisen between them, so that Kate found quarrelling with this pliable, unsensitive, and egotistical nature to be impossible.

Meantime Colonel Clinker had chosen Lady Anne for a partner, and was waltzing away in resolute silence, in spite of her ladyship's artless endeavours to extract some answering loquacity. He set his brows, looked neither to the right nor to the left, and refused to meet the furtive glances that every now and again Kate Brewster could not refrain from casting in his direction.

Already she was a little afraid of her own handiwork and its results. Perhaps, after that last speech of hers, when number fifteen came he might not appear to claim it, and then she should go straight home and cry her eyes out, and think what a beast she had been, how badly she had behaved. The little numerous acts of kindness he had performed

all recurred to her mind; she remembered how he had helped her out of her difficulties the first day they ever met, coming home from hunting, how good he had been to her when she fell, and lastly how he had offered to give up Opal when poor King Olaf died. She never could forget that. How many men placed in the same circumstances would have acted so, or shown such delicacy and consideration? She had been wrong in allowing her jealousy to overmaster her in such a degree. If he had his faults she at least was not the fitting person to point them out, or to throw his poverty and neediness in his face. She would endeavour to behave better if only she had the chance.

The band struck up the "First Love" waltz, and her heart beat fast and furiously. Several couples were already dancing. Would he or would he not come? Ah! yes, there he was, moving through the crowd, advancing straight towards her. She looked up into his face and smiled—smiled as she had not smiled that night.

"I believe this is our dance, Miss Brewser," he said quietly, offering her his arm.

She bowed her head in assent, and rose from the seat where she was sitting.

"I was very angry with you a little while ago," he said. "You said something to me that was not quite nice, that I do not think you ought to have accused me of."

She cast down her eyes in silence, feeling horribly guilty.

"Do you know what I am referring to?" he asked, still in that calm, grave voice.

"I—I—I think so."

She was far too truthful to seek refuge in denial.

"And you really meant it?"—fastening his eyes eagerly on hers.

"I—I—don't quite know. One never knows what to believe."

"Ah! I thought so," he broke out impetuously. "Somebody has been tattling to you behind my back, filling your head with all sorts of idle tales, which you—you, even against the evidence of your own senses, have chosen to accept."

"How do you mean against the evidence of my own senses?"

"Has not Terry been revealing confidences?"

"And even if he has," she retorted proudly, "have you so little trust in me as to imagine they would ever go any further?"

"No, but they have altered your whole manner, and made you greet me as frigidly as if I were a perfect stranger."

"And are you not very nearly one? Four weeks is a long time, and many things may happen in the interval."

"Not sufficient to effect so complete a transformation," he said bitterly. "When I left, when I said good-night to you, and we stood under the porch of Sport Lodge together in the starlight, you were very different then to what you are now."

"Ah! I have grown older and wiser in the interim. I am no longer either so weak or quite so foolish as I was."

"And yet you were nicer then than now."

"Indeed! You are exceedingly complimentary, and evidently don't consider that like good old port I improve with age."

"No, and yet you possess one quality in common with the wine mentioned."

"And what might that be?"

"You grow more crusty, Miss Brewser,

towards one who was vain enough to count himself among the number of your friends."

"Have you only come back to force a quarrel?" she asked coldly, for the conversation was drifting into a very profitless and fruitless channel.

"No," he said, "but I confess to having felt greatly hurt by the manner of your reception. I did think even for the sake of poor King Olaf, quite apart from my own, that you might have greeted me a little more cordially."

The mention of the horse's name—that gallant chestnut now reposing under the green sods—revived in full force all the old memories, the old sympathies and affections. Her lip began to tremble ever so slightly.

"Then why did you stay away so long?" she asked, and if he had not been blind indeed he might surely have guessed her secret at that moment.

"Why did I stay away so long? I stayed because my father has been awfully ill, and could not bear that I should leave him—because, after what you told me the other day, I thought I would try and yield my own sel-

fish wishes to those of others, and lastly because we had an infinity of troublesome legal business requiring our attention."

"Oh! indeed." Settlements, and a life interest in Miss Polly Paton's fortune, she thought to herself with a sinking heart. "Have you settled anything yet?" she asked.

He looked puzzled for a moment; then a light seemed to break in upon his mind.

"Oh! about India. Do you know, I have been seriously cogitating over the advice you gave me the other day."

"Advice? What advice?" said she, feigning complete ignorance.

"Don't you remember? Not even the very forcible manner in which you expressed your disapproval when I imparted a few of my financial difficulties to your ear? I see my memory is the most tenacious of the two."

"I really forget exactly what I said. I talk so much, and yet say so little worth remembering."

"You told me to give up my home luxuries, endeavour to pay off a portion of my debts, discontinue living above my income, and go out into the world and work like a man till things came round."

“Did I?”

“Yes. Why do you pretend to have forgotten the conversation so completely? All these four weeks that I have been absent it has recurred to me many and many a time—so often, indeed, that I have come to think it is rather a low thing after all for a big grown-up man like myself kicking his heels about in comparative idleness, and squandering the poor old governor’s hardly-earned savings.”

“A highly praiseworthy conclusion to have arrived at.”

“You see, Miss Brewster,” he continued very seriously, “when you spend a good deal of your time in a sick room a great many curious fancies and fresh ideas begin to dawn upon you, and when I saw my poor old governor lying on his bed hovering between life and death my conscience smote me sorely for having caused him so much uneasiness and thrown his money to the dogs. I resolved if ever he got well to try and lead a better and more profitable life, and make a thorough change all round.”

“What sort of change?” she asked uneasily, dreading what might be coming next.

“I hardly know. I could not settle any-

thing definitely without consulting my good angel."

"And who is she?"

Though why Miss Brewster jumped at the conclusion it was a she at all was curious in the extreme.

"*She* is the only girl in my life who ever has exercised any real influence over me—who has tried to arouse my better nature from the selfish frivolity in which it was steeped, and whom I would move heaven and earth to serve."

The answer was vague, but delicious. A soft, shy light trembled in the grey eyes.

"When I am with you," he continued, "I feel as if I must tell you everything about me—all the good and all the bad. Do I bore you awfully?"

"No, not a bit. Go on, I like listening."

"Well then," looking at her fixedly, "Shall I tell you of something extremely funny which happened to me the very day I left Foxington? You know all about that forage bill, and how hard up I was after Snowflake's defeat? I was bound to pay some four or five hundred pounds within the week, and I did not possess a fifty pound

note. Well, and now comes the curious part of the story. I received that morning a cheque for five hundred, signed by a respectable firm of solicitors, informing me of the fact that a client, who desired to remain *incognito*, wished to present it to me."

Not a muscle of her face moved under his searching gaze.

"Well!" she said carelessly, "and what did you do?"

"I returned the cheque immediately, but only to have it promptly sent back. Did you ever know anything so queer?"

"Never. Perhaps some rich old lady has fallen violently in love with you."

"You can't offer any other solution of the mystery, Miss Brewer?" he asked, looking a trifle disappointed.

"No, how should I? I hope you spent the money profitably?"

"I felt very much ashamed spending it at all, but to tell the truth I was obliged to, being so infernally hard up. I paid my forage bill first and foremost, and one or two outstanding accounts; the remainder will just enable me to keep going until the end of the hunting season, and after that" —

"Yes, after that what?" she interrupted eagerly. "Are you still contemplating making a bolt of it?" A fan is a convenient plaything at times. She began swaying hers vigorously to and fro.

"That depends entirely upon circumstances. I received the other day a most tempting invitation from a friend living in India, who wants me to go out there in March and stay all through the summer. He promises me first rate tiger shooting, besides plenty of smaller game; and if I were really to go out, I should be removed from the way of temptation, and have no inducements to spend. What do you think of the idea?" He had taken a sudden determination. He would find out that night, at whatever hazard, whether Kate Brewster cared for him or not. It was a desperate resolve, quickly conceived, and as quickly acted upon.

"Why should he ask me such a question," thought she on her side. "If he wants to go, let him go, but surely—surely it is unnecessary to consult *me*. It is downright cruel of him. If he can't see for himself how much I hate the project, how is it possible for me to say so? In other words, to

tell him that I love him, when I apparently fill so small a portion of his thoughts? Why—oh why does he torture me to give advice that I cannot give?"

But he failed to read the troubled workings of her mind.

"Well," he said again, "what do you think of the plan?"

Her womanly pride and dignity availed her but little in this conjunction.

"I—I—I do not think anything of it," she faltered.

"What? Do you mean to say you have no opinion one way or the other? That's very unlike you, Miss Brewer."

"It's not a bit of good asking me about matters I am utterly ignorant of. In an affair of this kind your own people are far more calculated to give sensible advice than a mere stranger like myself."

"I cannot bear that you should call yourself by such a name. However, we need not discuss this point at present; supposing I *want* your advice, and care for it and value it more than that of the whole boiling of friends and relations put together?"

"Such a supposition appears so entirely

without the pale of possibility that my imagination refuses to contemplate it. Your Indian expedition is a matter for yourself and father, and perhaps one other person," meaning Polly Paton, "to decide. A multitude of counsellors is eminently undesirable."

"If I construe that speech aright you refuse to give an opinion?"

"Since you press the point, Colonel Clinton, I do. My opinion can benefit no one, certainly not you."

"And yet you were the person who first advocated my going abroad!"

"Very likely," she retorted, with wilful obstinacy. "I advocate it still, as an admirable means of improving the mind, and removing petty insular prejudice."

He shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of impatience.

"You are utterly incomprehensible," he said, in tones of growing annoyance.

"Possibly," she replied, "though it strikes me the incomprehensibility is not entirely on my side. Other people beside myself are enigmatical."

"Well, anyhow," he said, adopting fresh tactics, "I suppose you will admit India to

be as good a place as any other to pitch one's tent in?"

"Quite as good, I should say, if not better."

"And there's pretty fair sport to be got out there, at least if report is to be believed."

"Yes," she said dryly, "and snakes abound, and cholera is not uncommon, neither is sunstroke, while jungle fever strikes down victims by the score."

"I will run my risk of those terrible evils," he answered, with a broad smile; "besides, I'm pretty good at standing heat."

"You'll be lucky if you do stand it, and don't have to *lie* it in bed instead."

"Why, what a Job's comforter you are, to be sure, Miss Brewser! However, I flatter myself I'm tough enough, and hardy enough to withstand the climate."

"You are by no means the first man who has so imagined, and discovered his error too late."

"I declare," he laughed, "I do believe you are trying to frighten me. However, I perceive you set your face against my Indian trip altogether."

"Did I say so?"

"Not exactly perhaps in words, but you certainly succeeded in conveying that impression to my mind. So far you have not received my confidences in a very encouraging manner, and I feel almost too shy to communicate yet another alternative, which perhaps might meet with greater approval."

"Am I such a very formidable person as all that?"

"I'm not quite sure. Sometimes I think that you are, and sometimes I think that you are not. Somehow I don't feel very certain of your sympathy to-night."

"You always have it," she said hurriedly. "Go on."

"May I? Well then, you must know that while up at Nevis my father and I have had several very serious business talks. In fact, it was chiefly owing to some bothering deed, requiring my signature, and which had to be altered and re-altered by a set of procrastinating lawyers, that I was kept such a deuce of a time."

"I suppose you did not mind it very much," she said, thinking of her rival.

"Yes I did. I minded it awfully, and longed to get back to Foxington. I had a

real bad time of it, I can tell you, especially as the governor took it into his head to preach me daily lectures on the subject of matrimony, which worried my life out, and drove me very nearly mad."

"Why should they? Such a desire was a very natural one on your father's part."

"Yes, but not on mine, unless," he added significantly, "I marry the right person, and the right person will condescend to give me a little hope."

She turned her face away, so that he might not see the colour crimsoning her cheeks. "I gather then, that the lady your father has selected does not altogether please your fastidious taste?" she said with renewed hope quickening the pulsations of her heart. "Since you have told me so much, is it fair to ask if her name is Miss Polly Paton?"

"Ah! I knew Terry had been betraying secrets. Yes, that is the lady's name."

"And is she—is she—*very* pretty and agreeable?"

"Oh! hang it all! I hardly know."

"And what does Miss Polly say to this proposed alliance? Does she give her con-

sent?" asked Kate gravely, for it was impossible to joke on so serious a matter, and for once she felt no inclination to indulge in chaff.

"I've never asked her," he said, looking somewhat confused.

"And what sort of a girl is she?"

"Oh! a nice, unaffected little countrified thing. Just the sort of girl to make a man an excellent wife."

"Indeed." And her voice once more resumed an icy tone. "A highly satisfactory arrangement all round. It is not often one hears of these *marriages de convenances* fulfilling so many requirements, but in your case we have not only the parental blessing, but also an unlimited fortune, and sincere affection on either side. Allow me to congratulate you. Have you fixed the day?"

"No," he said angrily, "and what's more I never shall. Why do you persist in distorting everything I say in this way? I never alluded to any affection in the matter. Polly Paton and I have known each other since we were boy and girl together, and are more like brother and sister than anything else. Can't you understand that you may

be very fond of a person, after a calm equable fashion, without being the least little bit in love?"

"Oh! you intend marrying on calmness and equability? Well perhaps they answer best in the long run."

"How aggravating you are, Miss Brewser. I shall never marry Polly, for I do not love her as a man should love the girl he wishes to make his wife, and under such circumstances it would only be doing Polly a wrong."

"You seem very considerate where Miss Polly Paton's feelings are concerned," she said, still actuated by a blind unreasoning jealousy which surely his words ought to have set at rest. "I suppose she is desperately in love with you, then?"

She had tried his patience very highly all throughout the evening. She had overstrained it at last.

"Miss Brewser," he said, with a dignity that became him well. "Forgive me if I remind you that that is a question you have no right to ask, and that I, as an honourable man, with any spark of chivalry in my composition, should be a beast in answering.

Since we do not appear able to discuss Miss Paton in a kindly spirit let us refrain from discussing her at all."

She coloured painfully at this well-merited reproof, but she knew that he was right. She loved and respected him for uttering the words, though they rendered her miserable in the extreme, and ready to sink into the ground with shame and mortification. Nevertheless, he had made two great mistakes that night. He had consulted her with reference to going to India, and also about his marrying another woman, and the last error was infinitely worse than the first. Her long, dark lashes, lay like a fringe on the soft cheeks, as she kept her eyes resolutely veiled, unconscious of his steady gaze.

"Come," he said gently, after a lengthened pause, "let us have a turn together. I have never danced with you in my life."

His arm stole round her waist, she laid her little hand in his, leant her head on his strong shoulder, and glided round the room with him. He, too, could dance, if not perhaps with the same light elastic step as Captain Fitzgerald, with a far sturdier, manlier one, which Kate infinitely preferred. He held her

tightly clasped, one little stray lock of hair brushed against his face every now and again, the music rang in his ears and intoxicated his senses.

“Oh, Kate! my darling,” he whispered suddenly in her ear, with low, passionate accents, “have you never guessed that it is you who I love? *you*—who I would move heaven and earth to call my wife? you—beside whom every other woman becomes an object of indifference? Oh, Kate! speak to me, look at me! I have waited so long, controlled my feelings so often, fearing I had no chance. Darling, give me some little hope at last!”

All at once heaven itself seemed opening out to her. The lights danced in her dazed eyes, her breath came and went in quick flurried pantings.

“Kate, my own brave, generous Kate, lift those sweet eyes to mine. Tell me with those lips, whose changing expressions I have watched so often, that you *do* care for me a little, that I am not wholly insensible to you!”

She turned her face to his, a tender light resembling the breaking of the rosy dawn

illumining its every feature, but at that very moment, close behind, like some omen of evil, she heard a voice—the voice of Captain Fuller, speaking to Mr. McGrath—say—

“Hulloa! Just look at Jack! He’s going it like a house on fire. Taking the heiress by storm, and I land my bet, an easy winner. I declare that fellow has the cheek of the Old Gentleman himself. They tell me he is as good as engaged already to a girl up in the North, and yet here he is flirting like the devil with Miss Brewser! Well, there’s nothing like having two strings to one’s bow in this world, for if one snaps the other is close at hand to fall back upon.”

All the joy, and the glad faith and the trust died out of her face immediately. Every word fell like a bitter stab on her heart. This, then, was how people talked, what people thought and said. Another second and she would have yielded, but now all her nature seemed turned to stone. Colonel Clinker in his excitement had apparently not caught his friend’s remarks.

“Have you nothing to say to me, Kate?” he asked imploringly.

“No !” she said, drawing herself up to her full height. “Nothing !”

A cold, pitiless light shone in her big grey eyes, even the face itself had changed so swiftly from the sweet, happy, girlish one of a moment before, it was difficult to believe it could be the same. She was experiencing one of those sudden revulsions of feeling which are apt to recur to us all at rare intervals, and which, when we come to think them over afterwards, make us tremble at our own sensations, and the bitterness of the language we have employed.

“Nothing !” he exclaimed, for his hopes had been cruelly excited by that brief period of silence. “Do you mean me to take that for an answer ?”

“Most certainly !” she replied decidedly, hardening herself more and more against him.

“Oh, Kate ! dear Kate !” he cried beside himself. “Don’t take away all hope. It is possible I may have spoken too soon. I will wait for months, nay years, if only you will let me, if only you will tell me that perhaps some day I may be rewarded. I have been an idle fellow, but I will alter that, alter any-

thing to please you, to win your love and affection."

"It is useless!" she said scornfully. "You plead well, being probably versed in the art, and display wisdom in wishing to secure 'two strings to your bow.' Just now you asked me for advice, and complained because I refused to give it. I do so now. Go to Miss Polly Paton, and even although you profess not to love her, try and secure her fortune. She may be more easily won than I."

It was cruel of her to speak like this. She knew it, but she did it purposely. A shadow of pain overcast his countenance. She had scoffed at his holiest, tenderest feelings, and trampled them in the dust.

"Miss Brewser," he said in a voice which struggled hard to conceal its emotion, "once already to-night you have accused me of being a fortune hunter. I may be poor, and I may be in debt, but I am, I hope, at least a gentleman, and I should never ask a girl to become my wife solely on account of her fortune. I have loved you, yes—and shall love you—in spite of what has passed between us to-night—quite independently of such considerations. Had you been a poor girl I

should have spoken out long ago. You, however, have chosen to believe differently, and nothing that I can say at present appears likely to alter your belief. I can only give my word of honour that it is so, and that apparently carries but little weight."

"Oh!" she cried bitterly. "Don't talk to me of honour. It is a mockery. What honour has the man, who before he even sets eyes on a girl, backs himself to marry her because she happens to be rich?"

"To what are you alluding?"

"I am alluding to that bet you made with Captain Fuller at the beginning of this winter."

"I have forgotten all about it even."

"*You* may, *I* have not. If you wish confirmation of my words, ask Captain Fuller to show you his betting-book."

"Oh! now you speak of it, I do recall some rubbish of the sort, but I never meant it seriously, in fact was much annoyed at the time."

"It is easy to say so now."

"I call my God above to witness that it is true. The bet was forced upon me by Captain Fuller, one night after dinner, and I, like a

fool and not knowing you then, was dragged into it."

"Pray don't make any apologies. I would rather you confessed your share in the proceedings in a manlier fashion."

"There is nothing to confess. Absolutely nothing but what I have told you. If you do not believe me, ask Terry, ask Mr. Grahame. They will confirm my story, and substantiate the facts."

"Thanks, I require no confirmation. I am satisfied as it is. Perhaps," sweeping him a mocking curtsy, "when next you meet *your friend* Captain Fuller, you will be good enough to tell him that he was mistaken after all, and that the heiress was not quite so easily caught as he imagined."

He stood and stared at her incredulously, as if even now he refused to believe the evidence of his senses.

"Kate!" he said wildly, "do you wish to drive me mad? Is there nothing I can say or do to make you believe in me?"

"Sigh no more ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never,"

she answered flippantly. "Ah!" looking

round with an air which intimated the conversation to be at an end, "I see Captain Fitzgerald seeking for me. Perhaps you will kindly tell him I am here."

"And are we to part thus? Have you no kind word to bestow?"

"Kind words," she retorted, "are wasted upon people one despises."

And then she left him with that parting speech ringing in his ears, a sorry recompense indeed for the devotion that had brought him all the way from Scotland, just to catch a sight of her face, to hear the sound of that cheery laugh he loved so well. And she felt like a demon. She was conscious of not being herself, of being in one of those moods when people are not responsible for their actions, but an evil spirit upheld her throughout, and now she was left to enjoy as best she might the results of her own handiwork. For the second time in her life the anchors of faith had been torn rudely asunder, leaving her to rock helplessly to and fro on the dark billows of unbelief.

"Nicest ball I evaw was at in my life!" exclaimed Captain Fitzgerald as he gave her his arm. "Nevaw saw such a number of

pretty women in one room before. Hardly a plain-headed one among the lot."

His small talk had been wearisome enough and empty enough before, but now Kate found it simply intolerable.

"Let me sit down," she said abruptly. "I'm dead tired, and want to go home."

"Shall I go and look for your carriage, Miss Brewsaw?"

"Thanks, Captain Fitzgerald. It will be the greatest service you can possibly do me. My head aches so dreadfully."

"Kate," said Mary Whitbread an hour later, when returning from the ball happy and radiant she stole softly into her friend's room, "forgive me for disturbing you, but I could not go to bed without telling you something—something which occurred to-night."

Kate was in her dressing-gown and slippers, crooning over the fire. "I think I can guess," she said, putting her two arms round the other's neck. "Mr. Grahame has proposed to you, has he not?"

"Yes, Kate, at the ball."

"Are you very happy, dear?" she said gently.

"Happier than I have ever been in my life. And you; have things gone well with you?"

She hid her face in her hands, and began to sob hysterically.

"Kate, what is the matter? You can trust me, surely."

"Oh! Mary. I am so miserable I don't know what to do with myself. I don't feel as if I ever could be happy and light-hearted again."

"Is it as bad as all that, dearest?"

"Yes, it is, and worse. Mary, do you remember telling me how one day I should wreck my whole life and refuse the love of an honest man whom I loved dearly in return? Well, I have done so to-night."

"But we can put matters right, Kate. They *must* be put right," said Mary with unwonted determination.

"No," she said drearily. "They can never be put right. It has all been my own fault from beginning to end, and I have said things to him this evening which no man with a particle of spirit could ever forgive."

"Oh! Kate what made you do it?"

She lifted up her tear-stained face and

said sorrowfully, "You may well ask that. I cannot tell you why. I felt like the people in the Bible, when the devil entered into them and they became perfectly unreasonable beings. I am sane now and probably shall remain so till the end of my days, but life is done for me, and I shall never know real happiness any more. I would give everything I possess in the world to live the last two hours over again."

Alas, even as she uttered the words, she knew too well that no amount of wishing could avail her! and that the past, be it good or be it bad, can never be recalled!

CHAPTER V.

HOUNDS met the following day at twelve o'clock, people being too drowsy and languid, after the dissipations of the night before, to turn out at an earlier hour. The fixture was at a village named Stoppington, situated within a couple of miles of Foxington. Ever since the time when the Hunt Ball grew into a recognised institution of vast importance, Stoppington covert had always been the draw on the next morning, although, owing to the close proximity of a line of rail, it was not always a certain find. In fact the interests of sport were in some measure sacrificed to the convenience and pleasure of the general public, who profited by this act of grace on the part of the Master by flocking to Stoppington in such vast numbers that the meet itself proved a regular *omnium gatherum* of high and low, rich and poor, humble pedestrians, forced to put up with that staid conveyance, Shank's mare, and carefully-attired horsemen mounted on two or three hundred-guinea hunters, while little children

played merrily in the gutters, and their mothers scrambled on to the stone walls bordering the trim gardens of their cottages, in order to obtain a better view of the goodly spectacle; for on this particular occasion the services of every crock within a radius of several miles were invariably put into requisition. Mr. Best, the sporting tailor—who although generally to be seen in that mysterious condition usually designated as half-sea-over, still retained in no small degree the primitive desire to slay, which in our ancestors prompted the fashioning of barbed arrow-heads and stone implements, and in our own days has carried the destruction of the fox to a pitch almost of infatuation—reaped at these times a rare and well-merited harvest. Although it could not possibly pay him, Mr. Best's hobby had always been keeping a stud of some eight or nine horses, which he let out on hire for two or three guineas a day, according to their qualifications. If the hirer were not particular as to an extra tumble or two, did not object to a callous mouth or a few little eccentricities of disposition, then the smaller sum was considered sufficient guerdon; but if the gentle-

man required a really seasoned hunter, thoroughly understanding his business, he had to pay accordingly. True, as regarded work, Mr. Best's lot were all thoroughly seasoned, and as regarded soundness there was but little choice. Bob was broken-winded, Jane suffered from fever in the feet, Jack Sprat had navicular, Sally afflicted with incipient cataract, and so on to the end of the chapter. But to-day, whatever the ailments from which they suffered, every single animal had to go out, having been bespoken many weeks beforehand, for strangers coming to the ball invariably profited by this opportunity of getting a peep at the celebrated Huntingshire country, while those who were already acquainted with its merits were delighted to revisit the old familiar scenes. Thus it happened that the meet was a monster one, representing all classes and grades of society, from the regular *habitués* on their finished performers to the urchins with grinning faces and tattered coats bestriding long-tailed, shaggy-heeled and hairy-coated cart-horses, some of whom were minus a saddle and bridle, a bit of old sacking and a twist

of rope filling their respective places. Big men on small ponies, timorous but ardent, superior tradesmen with uneasy seats and still more uneasy hands, farmers' daughters in blue habits and gold ear-rings, benevolent agriculturists on stout lazy cobs, a lean newspaper reporter fancifully attired but full of pride, and a couple of huntsmen from neighbouring packs, all helped to swell the list of equestrians, while labouring men, publicans, smiths, runners, shoemakers, tramps, smart nursemaids trundling perambulators heedless of their sleeping charges, and giggling girls, still further added to the goodly multitude—a multitude whose activity, energy, and keen determination to witness the slaughter of a fox and be in at the death, not only, as minute after minute elapsed, rendered the prospect of any real sport exceedingly remote, but also drove Will Steadall to the very verge of despair. A diversion was created for a brief period by a gentleman's horse, maddened by the noisy masses, bolting full speed down the narrow lane leading from the covert to the village, where, turning a sharp corner, the animal brought his infuriated career to a sudden conclusion by dashing up against a

wall of solid masonry and throwing his unfortunate rider headlong into the hard road, where he lay to all appearances perfectly lifeless, suffering from violent concussion of the brain, until picked up by a host of officious sympathizers and conveyed into the inn close by. This excitement unfortunately only offered the pedestrian sportsmen a temporary amusement, and they returned in full force to the covert side, where, during their brief absence, the huntsman devoutly hoped some bold pug might be forthcoming audacious enough to set all unpropitiatory surroundings at defiance. The hounds were whimpering in covert with plaintive, irregular notes, now rising to a hopeful chorus, anon dying away into a provoking silence, while ever and again the fox peeped distrustfully out. On one occasion indeed, irritated by the disagreeable proximity of Gaylad, he actually endeavoured to thread his way unobserved through the eager throng, but his presence was immediately detected by the foot people, who set up such a demoniacal yell as quickly drove him once again to seek the comparative quiet of the covert. To make matters worse, a biting north-east wind

prevailed, which chilled the marrow in the bones and set toes and fingers aching with pain. Horsemen lost patience, sought shelter in a friendly shed, or galloped briskly up and down, while others again stood still, resolutely striking their chests with extended arms in the endeavour to restore circulation to their shivering frames, and their steeds, animated by the cold currents of air blowing over them, put down their heads, rounded their backs, and lifted their heels in a highly disconcerting fashion. Everyone was growing out of heart and out of spirit, so that the joy became general when at length the hounds succeeded in chopping the bewildered fox in covert, thus ending his suspense and anxieties for ever. The dead body was dragged forth, the delighted crowd pressed round, giving vent to many naïve and original observations, while Will Steadall stood in the midst of the pack and swung the red carcass on high, as his darlings leapt frantically after it, until at last the dismembered body was thrown in their midst, and they fought and quarrelled over the fragments. Then, and not till then did the crowd in some small measure begin to disperse, while the slip was

given to the remaining foot people by the legitimate Hunt setting off at a good smart trot for Horniblow Wood, some three miles distant, from which place the Master still hoped to be able to show the host of strangers out some pretty fair sport, worthy of his well-known country. The laggards had scarcely reached their destination, many of them indeed being left behind altogether, when, as if to reward the huntsman's patience that had been so long and so admirably exercised, a dog fox broke covert immediately, and went off straight as a die for Crow's Hill, between which point of refuge and Horniblow Wood lay a stretch of the finest grass country in the whole of the Critchley Hunt. Will Steadall came galloping down the centre ride, flung open the hand-gate at its end, stood up in his stirrups, looked round and blew his horn; then when he had gathered the leading hounds together, leaving his first whip to bring on the others, he dashed forward in pursuit. "Gane away, hark forrard awa-a-y," shouted the delighted Field as they pressed after him. And now ensued such a galloping and clattering, such a pushing and shoving, bustling, urging,

fussing, throwing away of half-finished cigars, and thrusting on of ill-fitting hats as only those who have experienced the difficulty and importance of securing a good start in the crowded shires can fully realize. Fortunately, Horniblow Wood was a covert which accommodated itself to the necessities of all, being approached by no narrow bridle gates or tortuous lanes, but surrounded on all sides by gently undulating grass fields, whose verdant hue did the eye good to rest upon. Kate Brewser, after having spent a sleepless night, was out riding Sir Richard, but she looked a trifle paler than usual, and did not appear in her customary spirits, while Mrs. Forrester, mounted on her celebrated steeplechaser Singing Bird, was also present, the very incarnation of business, impelled into stirring action by the watchful eye of a wealthy and intending purchaser. The hounds were now tearing across the big pastures at a terrific pace, "heads up and sterns down," noiseless but deadly, evidently meaning vulpi-slaughter. A sheet would have covered them, so close did they lay together, while Will Steadall was doing his "level best" to keep up with the beauties.

"Come along, Miss Brewser," cried Mrs. Forrester enthusiastically, urging Singing Bird to his speed. "We're in for a run at last I *do* believe, and half the Field left behind. I've known hounds run like storm before now, with just such a biting, easterly wind as this, and what's more, between Horniblow and Crow's Hill there is not a drain nor a patch of gorse for a fox to fall back upon. If he only keeps on as he is going now, we have a good five-mile point before us, and when pug takes this direction he nearly always proves himself to be an uncommonly dashing customer. So come on. Don't lose your place for any sake."

Kate, to tell the truth, had been feeling up till now a little what the sex call "out of sorts," but Mrs. Forrester's words put her on her mettle, and, giving Sir Richard his head, she let him sweep along at will; besides, Opal's roan quarters were immediately ahead, and she did not wish to disgrace herself in the eyes of Opal's rider, however much she might affect to despise his good opinion. Giving a hasty backward glance, she perceived strings of hastening horsemen all hurrying in the same direction as herself

and Mrs. Forrester. The sweet subtle ecstasy of the chase began to glow in her veins, and dissipate sorrows, real or imaginary. Come what might she would not lightly suffer defeat or lose her pride of place. So she answered with a smile—

“All right, Mrs. Forrester, you give me a lead and I’ll do my very best to keep up.”

Colonel Clinker had never spoken a word to her that morning, but perhaps, if she rode very, very well, or even if she got another bad fall, he might unbend a little, and give her an opportunity—of what? Of asking his forgiveness, of telling him his love was returned, and that she was miserable at having offended him? She hardly knew; she was only conscious, as side by side she and Mrs. Forrester galloped on, of a devouring wish and feverish hope that something might turn up to alter the situation. The ladies never spoke to each other again, but settled down to work in regular earnest; indeed the pace was so great only the most fragmentary ejaculations were at first possible. They were now in a huge hundred-acre field, with the white hounds stealing mutely away in the distance. The going, in parts, was very

swampy and heavy, so that it became desirable to steady the horses in order to prevent their taking too much out of themselves so early in the day.

Mrs. Forrester profited by the opportunity to say in a hurried voice—


“You follow me, Miss Brewser, there’s a very nasty bottom, requiring a deal of doing, running all along the end of this field, as I know to my cost, having once remained in its mud for half-an-hour, since which I have taken the precaution of inspecting the available spots at my leisure. The other day I was walking round this way looking at some beasts shortly to be put up for sale, when I saw a capital place, where there was a bit of a gap in the hedge on the take-off side, and a fairly sound landing. Hounds are bending a trifle to the right, but never mind, you stick to me, and depend upon it we shall gain a good bit in the long run. There will be some dirty coats soon, I’ll wager anything.”

So saying, Mrs. Forrester, who, thanks to her remarkable bump of locality, knew every inch of the country in which she hunted, made straight for a given point where the big, straggly, overgrown fence in front of

them looked somewhat more yielding than it did on either side.

"Now," she said, "let me go first, and when I am over take your horse by the head and send him at it. It's a widish place, even here, but nothing to a free jumping animal who takes off well." She gave Singing Bird a reminder from her spurred heel, and without the smallest hesitation or undecided wavering which so often proves fatal to the nervous, flew the bottom in gallant style, sitting meanwhile as firm as a rock in the saddle. Kate waited till she was well into the next field, and then, having watched exactly how Mrs. Forrester had ridden Singing Bird, endeavoured to follow her example as closely as possible, with the result that a moment later she found herself also on the right side.

"Well done!" exclaimed Mrs. Forrester in tones of honest satisfaction, for she was too thoroughly excellent a sportswoman ever to ride jealous. "You did that capitally. Ha, ha!" looking round with a chuckle, and seeing no one in their immediate wake, "we've given some of them the slip this time, and higher up there's no getting over



the bottom at all, it widens out into a regular gully. Hullo!" as a riderless horse, his forehead plastered with mud, galloped by, "there's somebody come to grief already. Captain Fuller, I do believe, for it looks like that black mare of his."

The hounds were now directly in front of them, having once more swept to the left, and the two ladies found themselves riding close behind the huntsman and Colonel Clinker, while only half a dozen were with them in all.


"You see," ejaculated Mrs. Forrester triumphantly, "how right I was. We have pounded nearly the whole Field. Woa! Singing Bird, old man, take it easy now," for they were toiling up a sticky furrow, and hounds had relaxed their speed a trifle, the scent becoming colder on the heavy arable land. "There's no knowing how long this is going to last." So saying she caught hold of a lock of Singing Bird's mane, hoisted herself up in the stirrup, and leant far over the animal's neck, endeavouring to ease his hind quarters up the ascent. The sterns of the rearmost hounds just quivered a second or two, but directly they got on to the grass again, down

went their noses once more, and away they sped as fast as ever. It was a grand scenting day evidently. Will Steadall's sober face glowed with excitement as every now and again he flung a word of approbation after his favourites.

"Bee-utiful Colonel, ain't it?" he remarked to that gentleman enthusiastically. "Did you ever see a pack 'unt better in your life? Lord bless you, they *can* go, and no mistake. They'll take some of the shine and bounce out of a few of these 'ere strangers to-day, I'll lay a sovereign."

They were sweeping over lovely flying fences now, in the very cream of the country, negotiating them in regular steeplechase form, without time to be too fastidious in the choice of a place, or to take much of a pull at the horses. It was glorious fun striding along over the huge grass fields and ignoring gates with profound contempt. Horses began to lather, and their coats to shine, but their blood was up and they seemed to enjoy the chase as much as did their riders. Down Scapley Hill, through Merivale Dale, past Shepstone village, straight for Crow's Hill they flew, the

company growing more and more select, with Will Steadall on his famous chestnut, and Colonel Clinker on Opal, cutting out the work alternately, while Mrs. Forrester and Kate lay only a few lengths behind. The countenances of this little band flushed warmly red with that mingled look of elation and determination which each fresh fence, safely negotiated, each fresh comrade left behind, increases. For however selfish, under such circumstances the disappearance of a neighbour is borne with surprising equanimity, scarcely, indeed, in nine cases out of ten, causing subject for regret. Mrs. Forrester glanced hastily at her watch. They had been galloping exactly five-and-twenty minutes, at a pace that had already told on the horses, and made their riders begin to think a short check, just sufficient to enable them to recover their wind, would be desirable. Crow's Hill was straight in front, standing up tall and dark, with its naked black trees sharply outlined against the uniform light grey sky. Surely Reynard would seek refuge here among its friendly undergrowth, and persuade some fresh fox to take his place while he stretched his



wearied limbs full length, or hid himself snugly away under the ground. He made a bold bid, but alas! for his sake, just as he began to scale the grassy heights before him, a flock of huddling sheep checked his onward career. Then he gave one or two uneasy twists, trying to dodge them still, till, finding himself too hard pressed, he took a sudden fresh resolution, and set his brave face straight for Manford Hall, good three miles further on.

"He's a grand old dog fox, with a white tag to his brush," said Colonel Clinker to Will Steadall, as after a momentary hesitation hounds took up the scent in concert, and dashed forwards in pursuit. "I caught a glimpse of him just now stealing down the hedgerow. He's not done yet."

"Ay, Colonel!" responded he. "I do believe 'ees the very self-same fox as give us that great run we had last year from Maddington. Do you remember?"

"I should rather think I did! Why it was the best run of the season."

"It was so," said Bill Steadall; "but I believe this 'ere one is going to beat it. Forrard! my beauties; forrard on," and Will

Steadall once more set the grand chestnut he bestrode galloping full speed, for there was work in store for them both still, and Reynard had proved himself far stouter than either could have anticipated at the outset. But Royal's courageous spirit was destined to be tried to the utmost, for as they tore down the green incline, leaving Crow's Hill with its snug earths on the left, right ahead could be seen that dark fringe of pollarded willows bordering the treacherous banks of the nastiest brook in the county, and one at which many a gallant steed and daring rider had come to grief ere now.

"Is Sir Richard a good water jumper?" asked Mrs. Forrester significantly, as the thin silvery streak flashed in their eyes, "because if not you'd better lose no time, but hook it off at once to the nearest bridge."

"I don't know," answered Kate, donning a resolute look, "but," with an emphasis which clearly showed the bridge to be quite out of the question, "I shall very soon find out."

"Bravo!" cried Mrs. Forrester, approving of this daring spirit so entirely in union with her own. "We won't be beat now, will we?"

"No, I should think not. Not if we can help it, that is to say."

For a brief space fictitious hopes were raised in the breasts of the pursuers that the hounds after all might not cross this dreaded obstacle, but they were speedily dashed to the ground. Gaylad feathered and whimpered a little, then he plunged boldly into the stream, followed by the rest of the pack, who half lept, half swam across, and clambered up the opposite bank, emerging with dripping coats, heaving flanks, and moist, red tongues.

Will Steadall gave a cheer when he saw his darlings safely over and racing on with an ever forward scent. He clapped his spurs in Royal's noble sides, the first time they had felt their prick that day, and, putting on the pace, rode gallantly to meet the danger. But it failed to prove one for him and Royal. Rider and horse apparently possessed but one mind, were animated but by one impulse, namely, wherever hounds went, there, too, must they. So Royal cocked his slender ears, glanced contemptuously at the dark, gurgling waters beneath him, and, springing from his powerful hind legs, cleared the

whole thing without an effort, though from bank to bank could not have measured less than sixteen feet.

"Well done, Royal, old man!" cried Will Steadall heartily, as he gave the grand hunter's firm crest, a friendly pat of commendation. "Water, timber, banks, everything comes alike to you. You *are* a game 'un, if ever there was one, and there be mighty few as can jump in that style at the end of the fastest thirty minutes I ever seed in my life!"

There might not be many, but there was one, and that one only a novice in the art, for almost immediately Colonel Clinker, on his beautiful roan thorough-bred mare, raced up alongside with a "Hullo! Will; we did that tolerably well, I take it."

"Aye, sir," was the response, "I thought Royal one in a hundred, but for the weight I'm not sure but what that nag you're riding ain't almost as good."

"She's a clipper, and no mistake," said Opal's well-pleased owner.

Meantime, Mrs. Forrester had slackened her pace for a moment in order to make quite

sure the hounds were not likely to retrace their footsteps; but when she saw the now lessening pack racing away in the distance she said to Kate—

“There’s no help for it, Miss Brewser, we must do or die. After beating nearly all the field, with a very few exceptions, we cannot show the white feather now for fear of a wet jacket.”

“All right,” assented Kate. “Will you go first or shall I?”

“I’ve got the run in. Let me.”

So saying she shortened Singing Bird’s bridle in an extra firm grasp, and drove the horse with wonderful pluck at the brook. He was beginning to get done, and did not respond to her call with much alacrity; besides which Singing Bird, like many another good hunter, entertained a decided aversion to the sight and sound of rippling water, more especially when perfectly open, as in the present case. Now when he perceived the swift current rushing many feet beneath him, and looked down into the cavity his heart suddenly failed him, and for one fatal second he stood hesitating on the brink. Mrs. Forrester was thoroughly roused. Over

or in, she did not care which, but she was determined not to put up with denial. Singing Bird tried hard to cut it, but there was no avoiding that resolute hand, and sharp-rowelled heel; therefore trembling, but obedient, he gave a huge spasmodic bound, and jumped far into the air. Too far, and not wide enough, for he lacked the necessary impetus, and fell short with both hind legs. There was a scramble and a breaking away of loosened earth as Mrs. Forrester half rolled, half threw herself off, and by so doing avoided immersion; but she never lost hold of the bridle, and Singing Bird, finding the weight removed from his hind quarters, succeeded in struggling up the bank without injury.

“Humph! not a very grand performance,” reflected the old lady, quite unmoved by the catastrophe, preparing promptly to remount. “It’s just as well Mr. Baker was not anywhere near at the time, and if he gives me the hundred and eighty I’m asking, why, I’ll say good-bye to you my friend,” addressing Singing Bird “with pleasure.”

As she was soliloquizing a hard-riding farmer on a grey horse came pounding down

at the brook and immediately disappeared headlong, which spectacle did not prove altogether encouraging to Kate; nevertheless, the idea of turning away never entered her head for an instant.

"Come on," cried Mrs. Forrester; and then, doing as she was bid, Kate set Sir Richard at a place rather more to the right, where the banks had not been broken down by the passage of other horses. A rush through the air, a sudden cessation of the beatings of her heart, followed by a quite inordinate sense of elation, and the next minute she found herself in the same field with the hounds, Sir Richard having cleared the brook like a bird. She passed Mrs. Forrester and sailed away triumphantly after the two leading horsemen, never pausing once to look back. For a good ten minutes longer on they raced, over ridge and furrow, and the wide ditched fences, but at last the hounds were beginning to slacken their pace and throw up their noses. Will Steadall left them alone to puzzle it out, and then hunting beautifully they led the reduced Field over sundry small enclosures; from thence to a road into which a very uncompromising piece

of timber barred the way. Will Steadall, being a powerful man on a powerful horse, managed to crash through the fence, while Colonel Clinker, perceiving haste just then to be unnecessary, pulled Opal back into a trot, and waited to see what turn things were likely to take; but Kate, intoxicated with the success hitherto achieved, and conscious of his eye being upon her, charged the timber. There are limits even to the very best horse's powers of endurance, and Sir Richard, after five-and-thirty minutes' terrific going, was undeniably a wee bit pumped. Still he rose gallantly at the stiff ash palings, and managed to get over somehow, though he rapped them hard all round, and landed well on to his head. Truth compels the statement that Kate nearly cut a voluntary—nearly—but not quite; she struggled back into the saddle and saw Colonel Clinker looking at her from where he stood.

"Don't ride over the hounds *please*, Miss Brewser. Hold hard one second," he cried, his sportsmanlike instincts overcoming every other consideration.

"I'm not going to," she said shortly, blushing crimson with mortification, conscious

that she had only taken this hazardous leap in order to gain favour in his eyes, and feeling greatly disappointed at the result. "I wouldn't spoil sport for anything."

Just then the hounds began feathering down the road, and one by one as they picked up the scent giving tongue, streamed ahead. The end of this grand run must be surely near at hand.

"'Ave you seen our 'unted fox missis?" inquired Will Steadall of an old woman marching along with a bundle of sticks on her bowed back.

"Ay, sir," came the mumbling reply. "He be just in front of you."

"'Ow long gone, my good woman?"

"Not a couple of minutes, if as much."

With renewed ardour the small company of pursuers clattered on till, as they rounded the turn for Pinckney village, the whole pack burst out into a jubilee of sound. They were close on their fox evidently, when suddenly Will Steadall's sharp eyes spied a poor stiff, weary, and be-draggled object crawling stealthily along the narrow ditch bordering the roadside.

"Tally ho! Tally ho!" he yelled in delight,

with all the blood-thirstiness of a professional huntsman. "Yonder he goes. Forrard on, forrard on, my beauties."

The hounds bayed eagerly in response, and then in another second they closed round this bold, stout-hearted fox, and rolled him over and over in the dust. He had made a gallant bid for his life, and truly deserved to escape, but the Critchley ladies were renowned for their deadly staying powers, and also deserved some reward after the most brilliant run of the season. Forty minutes in the open and never a check to speak of does not fall to the lot either of man or hounds every day of their lives.

Mrs. Forrester and three or four men came trotting up just at this period, and they with Kate Brewser, Colonel Clinker, and Bill Steadall were the only representatives remaining out of all that huge Field of horsemen and women who had started in the morning, intent upon doughty deeds. Their ardour had apparently failed under so crucial a test of prowess. No wonder then that these successful pursuers of the chase were on uncommonly good terms with themselves, and chatted away while the obsequies were being

performed in a state of high self-satisfaction, all except Colonel Clinker who stood apart from the little circle and busied himself with his mare, whose feet he carefully examined, and whose girths he promptly unloosed, while she, standing with out-stretched neck and quivering tail and dripping flanks, gave evidence to the full severity of the pace, despite the stainless pedigree which had upheld her throughout.

“I’ve been rather rough on you to-day, Opal,” said her owner regretfully, “but it could not be helped, and I think and hope you will be none the worse by this time next week.”

He put out his broad-palmed hand and the mare began licking it like that of an old friend, while Kate, standing near, thought no man could possibly be really bad who possessed the power of endearing himself so to dumb animals, and who showed so much sympathy with and consideration towards them. Her animosity was fading away entirely, and she longed to ask forgiveness for her conduct of the previous night, only she scarcely knew how, she, who as a rule was but little addicted to shyness, now felt

almost too nervous to utter a single word of apology or explanation. If only he would give her an opening—then perhaps it might come more easily, but he apparently had not the slightest intention of so doing, and studiously kept aloof. And yet, all the while, as he stood there fondling Opal she longed to go up to him and say—

“Jack, it was all a mistake; I love you dearly, better than anyone in the whole wide world, and I feel perfectly miserable now that you are angry with me and won’t speak to me.”

Meanwhile people continued to straggle in, arriving with desperate haste, and each and all vowing the run to be the most brilliant thing they had ever seen, though how much they had actually witnessed remained matter for ample conjecture; nevertheless, so bountiful are the dispensations of Providence that their self-satisfaction appeared utterly unassailable. For full ten minutes the hounds tore and gnawed at poor defunct Reynard’s remains, while ever and anon some extra choice morsel gave rise to a fierce quarrel, ending in a regular tug of war among the ravenous candidates, while Will Steadall stood trium-

phantly in their midst, his weather-beaten face beaming with delight, cracking his whip and encouraging the hounds each in turn.

"Leu-leu, pull him, Leu-leu, pull him. Down Garrulous; 'ave a care Gameboy," he cried in his own choice and original dog language.

Then when the funeral repast was well-nigh concluded the beauties stretched themselves out on the grass and lay there panting after the exertions of the afternoon, with their parched tongues protruding, and their eyes looking fierce and red as they rested wearied heads on still more wearied paws.

"I suppose you won't draw again, sir?" said Will Steadall to the Master, touching his black velvet cap with respectful interrogation.

"No, certainly not," was the reply. "Hounds and horses have had quite enough for one day, and it is now close upon four o'clock. Daylight will have gone by the time we get them back to kennels and stables."

He had made Kate very proud and happy by presenting her with the brush, remarking—

“There, Miss Brewser, you have honestly deserved this trophy to-day. They tell me you went nailing well from start to finish. I only wish I had another brush to present to Mrs. Forrester, but she must content herself with a pad on this occasion, though you two ladies have certainly carried off the honours between you and put most of we men to shame.”

Mrs. Forrester expressed herself perfectly satisfied ; indeed, she was in an extra good-humour, for Mr. Baker, the rich brewer from Huntingville, when he appeared about a quarter of an hour after the fox had been broken up, was so impressed by all that he heard of Singing Bird’s meritorious performances that he purchased him on the spot, and—quite contrary to his habit—forebore to knock down the guineas.

“And you say he jumped the brook?” inquired Mr. Baker categorically, for although he was not likely ever to attempt so hazardous a leap in person he liked to feel that if the spirit by any chance *did* move him into performing such desperate feats of valour the animal he bestrode would not put an untimely check on his courageous intentions.

"Jump it!" returned Mrs. Forrester with an admirably assumed air of innocent indignation. "Why of course, my good sir. Do you suppose I should get over it in any other way?"

"Oh, I beg pardon, I didn't quite know," mumbled Mr. Baker apologetically. "A lot of people went round by the bridge. In fact, I was among the number."

"So you might, Mr. Baker; but allow me to remark that *I* did not employ such a passage," and she looked at him with a severity which carried so great conviction to the gentleman's beery faculties that, as before stated, the bargain was effectually concluded to the satisfaction of either party.

"Home, sweet home," was now the order of the day, the air growing chilly, and nothing much to be gained by longer procrastination.

"We ought to give our horses a drop of gruel," remarked Mrs. Forrester to Kate, when both of them had once more remounted. "[People are far too apt at forgetting that their animal's stomachs are comparatively about twice as small as their own, and consequently much less able to resist the effects of a long fast.

Horses, indeed, often feel faint and distressed after a hard day through sheer want of food, therefore I always make it a rule to give mine something or other when I get the chance, even a bucket full of chilled water answering the purpose when no oatmeal is forthcoming. After such a run as we have had to-day the poor things feel frightfully thirsty."

"I expect they must," answered Kate. "Have we a long jog before us?"

"Foxington is a matter of ten miles or so from here, even going by the short cut across the fields. However, Pinckney is quite close, and there we can halt at the public—a very decent sort of little place—put up for a few minutes, have the horses attended to, and indulge in a cup of tea or glass of beer, as the case may be. Come Jack," turning to Colonel Clinker, who having ascertained that Opal's precious limbs had escaped unscathed, was now devoting his attention to Sir Richard's, who moved his near fore leg rather tenderly, "will you escort us?"

Thus directly appealed to, a negative reply became impossible, so he bowed his head in grave assent, and the trio proceeded in the

direction of the village. They had not gone many yards, however, before he said to Kate in a courteous but distinctly frigid voice—

“Are you aware, Miss Brewser, that your horse has lost a shoe? His hoof is a bit broken, as it is, and I am afraid he will go lame if you don’t have one put on at once.”

“Thank you,” she said with a shy and furtive glance, for somehow her heart began to sink when she perceived the cold, impenetrable expression of his face. “Is there a smith in the village? Poor Sir Richard,” patting the horse’s smooth neck, “he has behaved so well to-day, I should be sorry to bring him home a cripple through any want of attention on my part.”

“He’ll be right enough directly he is reshod, and if you will permit me, Miss Brewser” (it seemed so funny to hear him call her Miss Brewser after the low, passionate, imploring Kate of the night before), “I’ll take the horse to the smithy myself, while you and Mrs. Forrester go inside the inn and order tea to be got ready. You must be tired,” for the first time displaying a slight interest in her condition.

She crimsoned suddenly under the brim of her neat pot hat.

"No, I'm not," she said; "not a bit," though the lassitude of physical fatigue and mental trouble had already begun to steal over her. "I'm horribly strong; always was since my childhood."

He made no reply, but when they arrived at their destination helped her to dismount politely, but still with that grave unsmiling courtesy which awed her more than any number of idle words, for it made her feel that they were far apart indeed, and that she had wounded him even more deeply and more seriously than she had imagined. Meanwhile he left Opal in the ostler's hands along with Singing Bird, saying he would return in a few minutes, and throwing Sir Richard's bridle over his arm led him through the village to the smithy.

"Oh! Kate, Kate!" he sighed, looking at the empty saddle where the girl so recently had sat, as if the very sight of it conjured up all sorts of visions, "you have treated me cruelly, nobody knows except myself how cruelly; but I love you still, and shall think of you always in the far off future."

While Colonel Clinker stood by during the fitting on and re-shoeing of Sir Richard, Mrs. Forrester superintended the preparation of the gruel at the inn, and not till she had seen the two animals under her charge plunge their thirsty muzzles into the pail and bid against each other for another draught of the welcome beverage did she return to the little clean parlour, with its stiff horsehair chairs, cheap prints, artificial wax flowers, and many coloured wool antimacassars. Here she found Kate intent upon pouring out tea with a huge earthenware teapot, from whose cracked spout the golden liquid descended in a steady stream. Presently Colonel Clinker came in, and the trio enjoyed a simple but highly grateful meal, after which they immediately set out on the homeward journey. The horses had revived a little, but showed unmistakable signs of the great exertions they had gone through, and could only proceed at a slow jog. Conversation between their riders was also extremely slack, in fact had it not been for Mrs. Forrester's occasional observations would have remained at a stand-still altogether. The party had not gone above a mile when they were overtaken by

Mr. McGrath, who cantered up on old Juniper, both man and horse looking suspiciously fresh, in face of so good and so protracted a run.

"Why, Terry! old man!" exclaimed Colonel Clinker negligently, "where the dickens do you spring from? I've never seen you all the afternoon, and made sure you must be lost."

"Lost, no, not I," returned Mr. McGrath somewhat indignantly. "It aint my habit to go out hunting and get *lost*," with a contemptuous patronage amusing to behold. "I leave that part of the business to my neighbours."

"And they succeed in doing so most effectually at times," put in Mrs. Forrester. "The Field to-day was scattered all over the place."

Whereupon she and Mr. McGrath promptly entered into a lively argument on its achievements, during which Kate and Colonel Clinker insensibly fell to the rear.

"May I say a few words to you, Miss Brewser?" he asked in a low voice directly they were alone together.

She felt all in a flutter at the suddenness of the request, but said "Yes," with great humility.

"I will not detain you long, only a minute or two."

"It's no matter, I'm not in any hurry," she replied, and then an awkward silence prevailed for a second or two. Colonel Clinker seemed to be brooding over recent events, for he apparently fell into a brown study, which lasted so long that at length Kate ventured to say timidly—

"Yes ; what is it ?"

He started and looked at her fixedly.

"Miss Brewser," he said, "I wished to bid you good-bye, that was all."

"Good-bye !" she echoed faintly, turning deadly pale.

"Yes, good-bye, perhaps for ever, certainly for many months, if not years. I am going to sail for India in the spring."

"In the spring !" she repeated, while all hope seemed to die within her breast. "So soon ? Why, that is quite close at hand."

"The closer the better," he said gloomily. "I am leaving Foxington by this evening's

train. I have no time to spare as it is," looking at his watch.

"And—and—you are really going? Giving up hunting"—she hesitated, then added softly—"and—and—all?"

"Yes, giving up everything. Father, country, home, hope, happiness, all for the sake of a girl who I was fool enough now and again to imagine cared for me ever so little. Listen, Miss Brewser," he continued, while his brows grew dark and stern, "yesterday you told me, or as good as told me when I spoke of my love, that all you had to give in return was contempt. How that speech wounded me it is needless to discuss at present. Well, in this world we are, all of us perhaps, too prone to overrate our own capabilities, and possibly you were right. I may be the despicable creature you more forcibly than politely intimated—"

"Oh! no," she interrupted, "not that, never, never that."

"It is too late now to retract your spoken words, but," and his face assumed a look of manly determination, "I intend to remain despicable no longer. Man is man, and master of his fate. I will wrestle with mine,

go far, far away, and either overcome my unfortunate passion for you, or else prove myself worthy of a love I have hitherto aspired to in vain. I daresay I have been foolish and presumptuous in my hopes, but they are over and done with for the present. As you yourself have frequently told me, I can work and put an end to this idle frittering of precious days. You don't know, Miss Brewster, how strong your influence is, or you might perhaps have exercised it in a less open and unfeeling manner; still I have no wish to reproach you, no wish to say a single harsh word, or part from you with any unkind thought in my mind; nevertheless, the time may come when I shall prove to you that your judgment of my character has been erroneous, and that I am not quite so mean, so mercenary, and so utterly devoid every feeling of honour as you imagine."

He spoke very low and hurriedly, but in those tones of deep emotion which only too clearly indicate a crisis in a man's existence. She had never loved him so well as at this moment when he was parting from her, perhaps for ever; and yet some curious, fatal power kept her silent, paralysed, and tongue-

tied, when one little word would have sufficed to put all right between them. She was not even insensible of this fact; she recognised it fully, but she could not bring herself to speak, and the vital moment slipped by once again, as it does with so many of us.

He paused a second as if half hoping to provoke some reply, then continued hastily—
“In all this business one thing alone rejoices me, namely, that if I have never done any particular good in the world, I can at least not accuse myself of having done any particular harm. Nobody will be any the worse for my going away, nobody, that is to say, except my creditors, and they I intend to pay at the earliest date possible. Fox-hunting and horse-racing up till now have satisfied my aspirations, without the perpetration of any worse follies. That thought may perhaps give me some comfort during all the long years of my voluntary exile. It is only quite lately I have begun to realise the fact that pleasure is not the sole god to be worshipped through life, and that profitable occupation may be found elsewhere than on the race-course. I have to thank you, Miss Brewser, for my mental enlightenment.”

She could endure the situation no longer. She felt she must say something, however trivial, to lessen the ever-increasing tension.

"And when—when do you go?" she faltered, though she knew perfectly well it was in the spring.

"Next March to India," he replied, "to-night from here."

"Why? Oh, why! n-n-need you leave?"

"It is a little late in the day to ask that question now," he retorted sarcastically. "I thought you were fully aware of my reasons, Miss Brewser, but if you are not it would take too long to recapitulate them. I should have gone sooner only, as bad luck would have it, I promised to ride a certain horse in the Liverpool, and can't possibly get out of the engagement, so must wait until the races are over."

Poor Kate! she had made her little effort, or intended to make it, and failed utterly. Her timid overtures of peace had been repulsed with scorn. He no longer asked her to marry him, never even besought her to alter her decision of the previous night, but, taking his dismissal as fixed and irrevocable, acted in such a manner that it was now per-

fectly impossible for her to endeavour to explain.

"Oh! dear, oh! dear," she said to herself, "what a terrible muddle I have made of my life, to be sure. I am miserable, so is Jack, and all for what?" But that question she found it impossible to answer.

Suddenly Colonel Clinker put out his hand with a farewell gesture and took the passive, unresisting little fingers in his.

"Good-bye, Kate," he said hoarsely, squeezing them in one long, parting, lingering clasp. "Good-bye; I shall never forget you so long as I live. It is folly, I know, but I cannot help loving you better than anybody in the world, and your image will always remain graven on my heart. Don't forget me altogether in return; think of me now and again, and remember if ever you want a friend, if ever you are in trouble, you may count upon me until death. Good-bye, my darling. God bless you and protect you, and grant that every happiness may fall to your share."

He raised the small gloved hand to his lips, and pressed one passionate kiss upon it, then—though Opal was faint and weary, and her

head drooped, and her slender limbs lagged, he dug the spurs into her sides, as she had seldom felt them dug before, and galloped off at full speed. So fast and so furiously indeed, that he never heard Kate Brewser's bitter cry of—"Oh! Jack, dear, *dear* Jack! Take me with you—take me with you—my heart is breaking;" or saw the outstretched arms, which seemed to implore Heaven for his return.

The gusty, freshening winds blunted the echoes of her voice, losing them among the sadly-swaying trees, and low-drooping clouds of evening; while Opal's hoofs clattered on the moist shiny road, bearing her gallant rider swiftly away, and the unheeded bitter tears of self-reproach rolled down Kate Brewser's face, as rain shaken from the petals of a fragrant rose. Her opportunity of forgiveness was gone, and she remained behind, charged with the deadly burden of a life-long regret.

So, by a cruel fate which rules our destinies, are men's lives made and marred.

CHAPTER VI.

THE determination and promptitude of resolution which rendered Jack Clinker so daring and so successful a rider stood him in good stead now, and enabled him to contend bravely against this, the first great sorrow of his life. His decision, though swiftly taken, was unalterable; and of one thing he felt perfectly certain, namely—that under the circumstances the very wisest and best course he could possibly adopt was to go right away. Away—to some place where he should not have the daily intermingled pain and pleasure of seeing Kate Browser, of watching her ride to hounds, and hearing her converse; and where, perhaps, in course of time, he might grow to review the past with tolerable calm. He had accordingly telegraphed early that morning to Bob Prendergast—a particular “pal,” intimating his intention of paying him a lengthened visit; and with that object in view, despatched all his horses, with the exception of Opal, to the less-distinguished hunting grounds of Cheshire. Needless to say that this seemingly hasty action on

Colonel Clinker's part gave rise to no little surprise, and disturbed poor Terry McGrath's equanimity most violently.

"What the devil's up, Jack?" he said, endeavouring to argue his friend into a more reasonable frame of mind. "Here you are in a first-class hunting country, enjoying nailing good sport, and you suddenly take it into your head to bundle off, stud and baggage, and go into Cheshire of all places in the world. What the deuce is the matter?"

"Cheshire's a very good hunting country also, Terry," returned the other carelessly; "and you ought not to talk of it in that depreciatory manner. I can assure you, Terry, that the Cheshire people themselves think no end of a lot of it."

"So they may and welcome," returned Mr. McGrath discontentedly, "if only they would leave us our crack jockey."

"Terry, don't be a fool, old man. It's far better I should go away."

"Jack," and Mr. McGrath laid his hand anxiously on his friend's shoulder, "something is amiss with you, I can see. Come, make a clean breast of it. Has that minx of a girl been doing anything to vex you?"

“I don’t know who you mean,” he replied haughtily, refusing to allow Kate—his Kate—to be called by such a name.

“Oh! Miss Brewser, of course. I like her awfully, as you know; but if she is playing the fool, why—why”—looking uncommonly fierce, “I’ll tell her a piece of my mind—that’s all.”

“There is not the slightest occasion for your doing anything of the sort,” retaliated Jack coolly. “And if you don’t mind, Terry, I’d rather not hear Miss Brewser abused. She’s the nicest girl I ever met in my life.”

Terry glanced at his friend compassionately.

“Hulloa Jack,” he exclaimed. “Has it come to this already?”

Colonel Clinker coloured under the other’s inquisitorial gaze.

“Never mind what it has come to,” he said prevaricatingly.

“You’re awful close Jack, and at least you might tell an old friend like me. Why if I had proposed to a girl, gad! you should be the very first person to hear of it. There would be no secrets between us.”

“Different people have different ways you

see, Terry. You must not quarrel with me on that account."

Mr. McGrath wrung his friend's hand warmly. "Quarrel with you?" he said. "No I should think not. All the Miss Brewser's and the rich young women in the world would never make me quarrel with my best and kindest pal. Dash 'em! I wish to goodness all these infernal women were at the bottom of the sea instead of coming and upsetting two peaceable people like you and I, who were perfectly happy without them."

"What's done can't be undone, Terry, old man," said Jack with a faint smile. "The only thing is to cry as little as possible over spilt milk."

And then the two friends drove off in a fly to the station together, and after Jack had taken his ticket, ensconced himself in a first-class carriage, and been treated by the guard and porters with as much respect as if he were a Royalty, Mr. McGrath went up to the window of the compartment to wish him a final farewell.

"Good-bye Jack," said he in a very subdued and forlorn little voice, "I suppose you don't mean to stay away for ever, and you'll

let me hear from you now and again, won't you ? ”

“ Of course I will, old chap,” said the other, trying to speak cheerily, and then as the train gave a whistle and began to move slowly off, he added hastily, “ I say, Terry, just tell me how Miss Brewser is going on when you write—if she's quite well, you know, seems in pretty good spirits, and all that sort of thing.”

“ Damn Miss Brewser,” growled Terry irritably, but luckily the remark was lost upon Colonel Clinker, who was now being whirled at increased speed past the platform, leaving his friend to return to a solitary home and inveigh disconsolately against women in general, and the heiress of Sport Lodge in particular. Perhaps his wrath might have been somewhat mollified if he could have seen Kate at that moment down on her knees before a photograph of his absent friend, gazing at it with loving streaming eyes and such a woe-begone expression of countenance as surely must have appealed to any man's pity.

* * * * *

Next morning Kate received through the

post a letter and a small parcel. She opened the former with feverish haste, for she recognised at a glance the bold round characters of a handwriting that had grown familiar to her. The note contained but a few short lines. "Dear Miss Brewser," it said, "For the sake of old times, those dear and happy times which may never come again, I hope you will not refuse to accept the accompanying trifle which I had made up, thinking you might like some small souvenir of poor King Olaf. That it may occasionally prove a means of recalling the donor to your mind is more almost than he dare hope." There was no signature, but that did not matter in the least; she knew perfectly well whose hand had penned the letter. She read it twice, nay thrice, as if committing the brief contents to memory, and then with trembling fingers undid the parcel. It contained a hair bracelet, beautifully mounted, clasped with a true lover's knot, and fashioned out of her dead favourite's soft, silky, chestnut mane. The kind thought which had prompted the gift, more than its actual worth, touched her to the quick. How good he was! how kind and considerate, and how different to any

other man she had ever known! But it was no use thinking of all that now, after she had sent him away and told him that she despised him. She indeed! who was not fit to hold a candle to him in any respect! So she mused bitterly. But there was still another and a greater surprise in store, for when she entered the stable a couple of hours later, there, to her astonishment, stood Opal, placidly tearing down the sweet-smelling hay from the rack overhead.

"Stirrup," she exclaimed, "what is the meaning of this?"

"It be Colonel Clinker's horders, Miss Kate," answered the good old man, respectfully. "The man come hup at six ho'clock this morning, with ha message to say as 'ow Colonel Clinker was gone haway, and 'ee 'oped you would take care of Hopal and ride 'er till 'ee come back. 'Owsomdever, miss, bif hi 'ave done wrong in taking the mare hin, she can go 'ome hat once."

Kate looked at the sleek roan quarters she knew so well with fast-filling eyes. "No," she said in a husky voice. "No Stirrup, let her remain. Since Colonel Clinker wished it I will take care of Opal till—till he

comes back." She left the stable hurriedly, went into the drawing-room, which happened to be empty, and buried her face in her two hands. What an inestimable treasure had she not thrown away in refusing this man's love! Sob after sob rent her frame, she sat weeping there all alone, taking no count of the passage of time, until the door suddenly opened and Mary Whitbread entered.

"Kate," she said, "what is the matter with you?"

She raised herself with a guilty start from the prostrate position into which she had fallen, wiped away the wet tears hastily, and answered "Nothing."

"Nothing! Oh! Kate, what is the use of trying to deceive me? Has anything fresh happened? Ever since yesterday evening you have looked perfectly miserable, and yet you tell me nothing is the matter. Will you not trust me, dearest? Troubles are doubly hard to bear when kept to one's self, and you know how gladly I would help you if I could."

Mary's sympathy touched her heart.

"Do not pity me," she cried. "I cannot bear it. He—he has gone away for ever,

and I shall never s-s-see him again," relapsing into passionate weeping.

Mary looked serious at this piece of intelligence.

"And I suppose you have driven him away, Kate? Is that it?"

"Yes," she sobbed, "I, I fear so."

"Kate, you deserve to be whipped."

"I—I know I do Mary," she said very penitently; "I only wish I *could* be whipped, if it would mend matters."

"You are a perfect fool!"

"I have nothing to say in self-defence. I feel that I am."

"And this misunderstanding is entirely your own doing?"

"Entirely. But that only makes it ten thousand times worse."

"Not altogether. Colonel Clinker must be brought back. If no one takes any steps to do so, why I will, that's all." Mary's fair face wore an air of resolution seldom depicted thereon, but Kate rose from her seat and began pacing tempestuously up and down the apartment.

"I forbid you, Mary," she cried with great

vehemence. "Once for all I positively forbid you. It shall never be said of me that I ran after any man, however much I might care for him, besides," she added reluctantly, speaking as if the words were dragged forth one by one, "after what has happened—between—us he—will—not—ask—me—to—become—his—wife. I—know—that—quite—quite—well."

"Then what is to be done? Are things to remain as they are?"

"They must. No interference can be of any avail."

Mary threw her arms round her friend's neck, and pressed the tear-stained face to her own.

"Oh! Kate," she cried compassionately. "Poor darling Kate! Won't you let me try and help you if I can?"

Kate shook her head wearily. "No, Mary," she said. "It will do no good."

"But Kate, you love Colonel Clinker and Colonel Clinker, by your own confession, loves you. Why on earth should you keep apart?"

This was an interrogation impossible to answer.

"I, I don't exactly—know," mumbled poor Kate dolefully."

"I should think you didn't. No more does anyone else in their senses. The whole thing is childishly ridiculous, and I shall sit down and write to Colonel Clinker at once. A few words of explanation will suffice to clear up all this foolish business and set it on a sensible footing. Eh! what's wrong now?" for Kate was facing her like a wounded tigress, the big grey eyes all aglow with painful excitement and ill-suppressed passion.

"Unless you wish to make me sink into the ground with shame," she cried, "you must not do any such thing. Colonel Clinker has GONE of his own free will, and must *return* of his own free will. I will not hold out my little finger to bid him come. It would be unmaidenly, indelicate and immodest, and any interference on your part will only succeed in driving us still farther apart than we are already."

"But Kate, I thought you cared for him?" protested Mary in astonishment.

"So I do," she answered vehemently. "I care for him more than I could have believed

it possible I should ever care for anyone, but that is neither here nor there. Oh, Mary!" she continued, suddenly dropping her voice into a plaintive minor key, "can't you understand? Since he has been so blind, so utterly dense and crassly stupid as not to find out that fact for himself, how can I allow you or any third person to point it out to him? I would rather die first. He may be proud, but so also am I, and no nice girl cares to fling herself at a man's head in that sort of way."

"But it wouldn't be flinging yourself at his head, Kate. He has asked you once already to be his wife."

"Yes, nevertheless he won't do so again in a hurry. Oh, Mary," passing her hand wearily across her contracted brow, "if you were in my place I am certain you would feel just as I do. It is so hard to explain things, to put one's meaning clearly. We have had a desperate quarrel. He was not to blame in any way, it was my fault throughout."

"Then you ought to ask his pardon, Kate," said Mary decidedly.

"I wish to goodness I could. I tried to

do so, but somehow the words would not come, and then everything went wrong."

"And in the meantime you are thoroughly wretched?"

"Yes, I am; but there's no help for it."

"There's a great help for it," retorted Mary vivaciously. "Nothing can be more foolish than for two people who love each other to go on as you are doing. Kate, dear, do be sensible. I promise not to write to Colonel Clinker since you dislike the idea so much, but sit down and write him a line yourself. Pretend you wish to thank him for the bracelet."

"No," she said doggedly. "He would not come. He will never propose again."

"Then take the bull by the horns and propose to *him*," answered Mary cheerfully, for at length she fancied she could detect symptoms of yielding. "Remember this is leap year, and you would only be fashionable."

But Kate refused to vouchsafe any answering smile.

"It cannot be," she said sorrowfully, and then without another word she walked out of the room, and Mary knew she had proved unsuccessful in her endeavours at bring-

ing about a reconciliation, and that the breach between the pair was wider and deeper than she had imagined.

"I must see what I can do yet," she said to herself; nevertheless she felt somewhat defeated, as a person naturally does when his or her friendly offices have been peremptorily and conclusively rejected. She determined, however, on making one last effort, and with that object in view followed Kate up into her bedroom.

"Kate, dear," she said regretfully, "I can't tell you how sorry I am about all this sad affair. I hoped so much that everything might come right, and thought how nice it would be for you and me to be married together, on the same day, and in the same church."

"That's a foolish fancy, destined never to be realised," said Kate sadly. "But tell me, Mary, about yourself. Are you in earnest or only joking?"

"Very much in earnest," replied Mary, the colour mantling in her palid cheeks. "I did tell you, if you remember, on the night of the ball, but since then, seeing you

so unhappy, I have not liked to trouble you with my small affairs."

"What a selfish brute I am to be sure!" exclaimed Kate in a fit of sudden penitence, for her conscience smote her as she remembered how totally her own individual concerns had of late absorbed her full attention. "Tell me about everything now, Mary dear, just by way of showing how kind and forgiving you can be."

"Well, then, you know that Mr. Grahame has asked me to be his wife," said Mary, with a blush and a smile. "Very foolish of him, is it not?"

"I don't agree with you at all. I consider Mr. Grahame displays very sound judgment, and most excellent taste in his choice. So you two are actually engaged?"

"You are not angry I hope, Kate? It seems so ungrateful of me to think of leaving you, especially now, when you are in trouble."

"Mary," she said gravely, "I'm not so bad as all that quite, and whatever my own private feelings may be, I cannot help being glad for your sake."

"If you would rather, Kate," said Mary timidly, "I will give him up even now."

"And a nice sort of creature you would think me if I accepted such a sacrifice. No, no, if I cannot be happy myself I can at least try and make others so. Besides, you are not going to get rid of me so easily as all that! I propose paying you and Mr. Grahame most unconscionably long visits."

She was struggling hard to bear up, and not let Mary guess how terribly the prospect of this second parting affected her.

"You might live with us altogether," suggested Mary eagerly.

"It is impossible to make definite plans at present, dear," she answered gently. "I contemplate a solitary future as an elderly spinster, with no other companion save a pampered and indulged cat."

"It goes to my heart, Kate, to hear you talk like that. Why should you not allow yourself to be happy, too?"

She strode a pace or two up and down the room, then went to the window and looked out drearily on the still, grey sky and pale green fields.

"Do not let us discuss the matter any

more," she pleaded with a great unconscious sigh. "I do not want to bother people with my troubles if I can help it."

Poor Kate, short as had been her life, she had already learnt how the outside world only appreciates what is bright and cheerful, and turns its face away from the dark, sorrowful side of the picture. A little house sparrow hopped down from the eaves of the roof as she spoke. The tiny impudent fellow sat there chirping, wagging his tail, and twisting his small intelligent head from side to side with an air which seemed to say he approved of Kate's resolution; but just then a gust of wind uplifted him on high and bore him far away like some messenger of peace and love.

Time went by—very, very slowly as it appeared to Kate—hanging terribly heavy on her hands, while even hunting seemed shorn of its chief enjoyment since Colonel Clinker's departure. The zest of a good run was in a great measure lacking now that he was no longer present to cheer, encourage, and show her the way. People, to her mind, had suddenly grown more stupid and uninteresting than formerly, horses more

troublesome and unsatisfactory, hounds less swift, foxes more twisty than at the commencement of the season, the whole world, in fact, out of gear. And all this because one particular person, who, waking and sleeping, filled her thoughts, happened to be absent.

By degrees, as the weeks wore away, Kate grew fitful and uncertain in her moods, at times feverishly talkative, at others abstractedly silent, while at covert side, after the first interchange of greetings was over, instead of laughing and jesting with every fresh comer as formerly, she now preferred slipping away by herself into some quiet corner, from which she only emerged when imperatively necessary. She liked to stand there lost in a brown study, alone and unobserved, till hounds found, and then she crammed her hat on her head and rode in a reckless, desperate, devil-may-care sort of way which alarmed the hard-riding men for her safety and filled her own sex with envy, hatred, and malice. She never would hunt Opal, though she hacked her several times out to covert, feeling she was only keeping the mare in trust for her rightful owner, and fearful of injuring her in any way. Curiously

enough, also, she seemed in these days to bear a charmed life, for now when she went harder than she had ever done before, her horses scarcely put a foot wrong, and covered themselves with glory. She courted danger in vain, as is so often the case with the brave. All invitations to dinner, except with Mrs. Forrester, whose friendship she valued, she steadily refused. People—especially extraneous people—bored her, and though she tried hard to be civil to them, she shunned their society whenever it was possible. She, who formerly was so bright and lively, so easily amused by trifles, now took but slight interest in passing events. She lived a purely passive existence, just as if all the mainsprings of her innermost soul had been stricken down. The Foxington doctor, a kindly old man, meeting her one day in the streets, declared she looked pale and thin, and strongly recommended change of air. She shook her head with a quiet protesting smile. It was nonsense to talk of change of air! What good could it possibly do *her*? It was not *that* she pined for by day and by night. She kept her sorrow bravely and resolutely to herself, never mentioning it

again even to Mary Whitbread, though the latter, seriously alarmed at her altered habits and condition, would often say—

“Kate, dear, don’t grieve any longer. Do try and forget the past.”

“I *am* trying,” she answered wearily. “God only knows how hard, but I can’t forget so soon. Only a few weeks have gone by. Give me time, Mary, give me time, and above everything take no notice. I don’t want to spoil anybody’s pleasure if I can help it—and—I would rather be left alone.”

And whenever the subject was brought forward that was the constant burden of her reply, “Leave me alone, let me be by myself.”

She was like some noble, wounded beast, who, when he feels he has received his death wound, separates himself from the herd, and lies down in solitary agony to bear his cruel hurt, apart, untended, and alone.

So time passed till March; the roystering, blustering month of March was ushered in with clear skies, dry, pitiless winds, and hurricanes of dust, which whitened all the trees and hedgerows as they were whirled along by the violent blasts of chilly air.

Meantime the sporting papers were full of the forthcoming Liverpool, and the odds against the favourites. Among these latter Figaro's name appeared frequently. He, Kate knew, was to be Colonel Clinker's mount, and she followed Figaro's alternations in the market with devouring interest. The *Field* became her constant study, for among its pages she occasionally came across the name of the man she loved.

And as March set in, Mr. Grahame not unnaturally began to press his marriage, and urge that some day might be definitely fixed.

"Waiting can do no good, Miss Brewser," he said; "I have somewhere about eight thousand a year, and the sooner we are married the better."

Kate would not hear of standing in the young couple's way, so she gave her assent immediately, knowing procrastination could only delay, and not avert, the evil day when she should lose Mary.

"You will look upon our house as your home of course," said Mr. Grahame, who entertained a profound respect and admiration for Kate; "that is to say until you marry, I suppose."

"Thanks," she replied gently, grateful for the kind offer, "but I am not thinking of committing matrimony at present."

In consequence of this conversation she took Mary up to town, and insisted on ordering a most handsome trousseau, with gowns suitable to every conceivable and inconceivable occasion, the expenses of which she defrayed, in spite of Mary's repeated remonstrances.

"You are going to be a dreadfully rich lady soon, Mary," she said playfully, "and I may never have the chance of making you any more presents. Let me do so while I can. It pleases me, dear." She never once let Mary guess at the true state of her feelings; only in the solitude of her own room at night, when the bustle and confusion of the day was over—for what with trying on frocks and shopping they had been terribly busy since their arrival in town—did she break down, and think despondently of the future. How desolate and forlorn her life appeared as it stretched away in all the long, long years to come. Nothing to live for, nothing to look forward to. True she had wealth, but wealth could not give her what

she wanted, could not fill the aching, desolate void in her heart. Sometimes she thought she would turn hospital nurse, or sister of charity, and try and merge her own sufferings in those of others, but the vitality within her was too young and too strong, not to rebel against such a consecration of her youth. She would wait—wait at all events until after the Liverpool, perhaps something might happen, some unforeseen event, which might alter the present aspect of affairs. A faint, unconscious hope fluttered in her heart. At twenty-two to go on living day after day, month after month, year after year, perhaps till she was seventy or eighty, without any change taking place, was a prospect altogether too dreadful for her imagination to realise. A heavy lowering cloud darkened her brain, making her feel unlike her true self, and seeming as if it must burst before the clearness of her mental vision could be restored. Perhaps it was well for her in these days that the constant bustling from place to place, the hurrying from shop to shop, proved some distraction. But in the midst of all the business she had to attend to she went about dreamlike, as a person in a

trance. Her imagination was picturing foreign lands, and far off countries, fired by Colonel Clinker's mention of them. The Scotch blood coursing in her veins rendered novelty, enterprise, and adventure eminently attractive. The spirit of the old Highland Brewsters had descended upon her, and she wearied of the strict conventionalities and petty meannesses of every-day life. She longed to go right away, far from all hackneyed and frequented resorts, to distant continents, where the foot of man was but rarely implanted on the virgin soil, and where life was beautiful in its primitive simplicity; where huge forests, rolling prairies, lofty mountains, and boundless plains filled the mind with silent adoration of nature, and a sense of the insignificance of each tiny atom called a human being. When accompanying Mary to that eminent *modiste*, Madame Sophie, and listening mechanically to the voluble foreigner's explanations as to how *ruches* were better worn this year than kiltings, and how bodices *à la bièrge* would be all the "mode," her thoughts invariably wandered off in this direction. She pictured herself living quite alone with

Jack (or perhaps just old Maggie to do the dirty work) in a cosy wooden hut, situated in a picturesque valley surrounded by tall purple peaks, with a clear and rippling stream meandering through the dale, round whose verdant banks the shaggy-haired, meek-eyed cattle clustered—for they would own a ranche—and in the morning quite early, while the sun was still struggling with the hazy clouds of dawn, Jack would go out on horseback, lasso in hand, attired in light shooting clothes, palm hat, puggery and yellow boots, and capture the stragglers, or count the calves, while she, also up with the lark, would clear away the breakfast, make the beds, mend the linen, do a little gardening, feed the chickens, churn the butter, polish the furniture, and then when Jack was expected, put on a pretty clean print frock, such as he liked, all ready to receive him, and give him his dinner. After that they would talk over the events of the morning, and perhaps go out fishing together in the burn, and catch a dish of trout for their evening meal, or else have a scamper on horseback over the prairies, or employ themselves usefully in

carpentering. Anyhow they would never remain idle. And then in the evening, when the day was done, when the round moon rose silvery clear from behind the tall outlines of the misty hills, when the bright stars twinkled and shone like myriads of sparkling gems, when the sky overhead resembled a pure blue-green vault, and the night air, soft and balmy, whispered sweet lullabies of rest, then Jack would light up one of his long cigars, the red end gleaming like a glow-worm in the semi-darkness, and they would sit side by side in their little garden, glorious with all sorts of beautiful many-tinted flowers, thousands of miles away from the old world, and talk of times gone by, of Snowflake, of Opal, of poor King Olaf, of Foxington, Nevis, and familiar friends and places—talk till the peaceful twilight grew drowsy and dark, till the tops of the tall trees in the neighbouring forest began to rock gently to and fro, sighing and moaning like living creatures, till Kate's heart melted and throbbed under the sweet delicious spell, and suddenly Madame Sophie's shrill voice rang out—

“Mais, oui, certainement, n'est-ce-pas, Mademoiselle Brewser, il faut absolument

que le corsage de Mees Whitbread, soit coupé en cœur, surtout pour une fiancée? Cela va sans dire, et ce sera bien, bien mal autrement."

With a hasty conscious start, Kate thus appealed to, returned from dreamland to the exigencies of the present, as represented by Mary Whitbread, struggling womanfully but vainly, to impress upon Madame Sophie the fact that she detested gowns cut with only an inch or two of waist, sleeveless, and all but bodiless.

"Ça fait rien, Mees Whitbread, je vous assure. C'est la mode, et lorsqu'on dit ça, on dit tût, n'est ce pas Mademoiselle Brewer?"

The pleasant visionary castles in the air tumbled with a crash, all the more forcible from the exalted altitudes into which they had been raised.

"I place every confidence in your good taste, Madame Sophie," answered Kate with a sigh, "only you must be sure and please Miss Whitbread. Remember it is she, not you, who will have to wear the garment when finished."

"Thank goodness," she reflected wearily, "*corsages en cœur* will not be *de rigueur*, in

my castle. We can leave all those frivolities behind, all those senseless and idiotic fashions of which we poor fools of women are the slaves."

"Allons donc!" exclaimed Madame Sophie, with a significant and despairing shrug of the shoulders, as the two girls took their relieved departure, "*cette Mademoiselle Brewser elle est jolie personne certainement, mais mon Dieu! bizarre comme tout!*"

Poor Kate! she might be foolish and in love, but even at the best of times she and Madame Sophie could have but little in common. That, however, is seldom any reason for one's fellow creatures to stay their judgments, or withhold their hastily formed opinions. On the contrary, the less we are acquainted with each other the more apt are many of us to jump at unfavourable conclusions, charity, in most cases, being a quality acquired, rather than inherent, in the human species.

CHAPTER VII.

THE great Liverpool steeplechase was over and past. Kate Brewser would have given all she possessed in the world to have been present at it, but a curious, and utterly feminine feeling of shyness had prevented her propounding such an idea, even to Mary Whitbread. She remained quietly at Sport Lodge, albeit inwardly consumed by a burning curiosity to know how matters had prospered on the course, and whether Figaro and his rider had distinguished themselves. She had intended asking Mr. McGrath, who left Foxington for the occasion, to send her a telegram directly after the race, but her heart failed her at the last moment, and he took his departure quite unaware of any such wish. It was customary at Sport Lodge for one of the stablemen to ride down to the station immediately after breakfast, and bring up the morning papers. Kate was eagerly awaiting their arrival now in order to gain the desired intelligence, and stood at the hall door, watching for the first sign of the man's

return. Presently she distinctly heard the slow tramp—tramp—tramp of horse's hoofs coming up the drive, and rushing out obtained the newspaper without loss of time. She never paused to look at the daily telegrams or leading articles, but made straight for the sporting column. Figaro, Figaro, Figaro. No, his name was not even among the first three placed! Then she returned to the drawing-room, sat down on a chair, and prepared more calmly to read the details and learn the reason of his non-success. It appeared interesting reading, for she sat quite still, with her great grey eyes fixed on the paper she held in her hands; but suddenly, with a quick, sharp cry of pain, she let it fall to the ground. She had been deep in an account of the Grand National, and was perfectly unprepared for the appearance of any such alarming and startling paragraph as the following:—

“Figaro now seemingly had the race at his mercy, for he landed on the racecourse ahead of everything else, but Capt. Moonlight's rider, calling on his horse, somehow struck into the heels of the leader, and the pair rolled

over together. Mr. Cockerstone escaped with a severe shaking, but we regret to say that Colonel Clinker was most seriously injured, and conveyed from the course to the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, where he now lies in an insensible condition."

She seemed completely stunned by this intelligence, and for many minutes sat there, to all intents and purposes, paralyzed with horror. Sounds fell unheeded on her deafened ears, external objects failed to create any impression. The cloud which had been hovering over her so long had burst, and produced a state of semi-unconsciousness; but gradually, and by slow degrees, a resolution began to shape itself in her mind. At first it was dim, hazy, and undefined; but it grew and grew, until at last it reached such a pitch of intensity that she determined to act upon it at once. She would go to him and nurse him! Every consideration of propriety and circumstance went to the wall before the one great, overpowering longing to see him again, and be by his side. For aught she knew, he might be dying—dying at that very moment—while she sat lazily at

home—with those false, cruel, wicked, wicked words of hers still ringing in his ears, and embittering his last moments. The thought was terrible. He probably no longer cared for her, might, indeed, have grown to hate her in the interval; but she felt she could never rest until she had seen him, and implored his pardon. No matter what he thought of her, what anybody thought, she knew such a course of action to be right, since her innermost conscience unsparingly told her so. Her pride had brought her to this pass, and now her pride must stoop to the very dregs of self-abasement before she could hope and expect forgiveness. But she would keep her intention to herself, she would tell no one of it, not even Mary Whitbread; she was very kind and very good—only in moments of such agonising sorrow as the present the sympathy of others would fail to bring any comfort—they could not enter into her grief, or realize how she felt; and besides, Mary would either oppose the project or else offer her company, both of which Kate felt to be undesirable. No, she should go to him—and go by herself—all alone. No one should help her, give her

good advice that she did not want and refused to accept, or put any other idea into her head. Now and again occasions arose in one's life when the first swift, unreasoning impulses were the best, the impulses that came straight from the heart, untrammelled by petty conventional prudential considerations. So she said to herself, and so saying, went hastily upstairs, put on her hat and jacket, hurriedly stuffed a few necessities into a bag—for it was just possible she might be detained, or miss the evening train—wrote a short note of explanation to Mary, accounting for her sudden departure, and then slipped downstairs, stole noiselessly out by the back door, and so into the drive, where the tall laurels, growing on either side the winding drive soon effectually hid her from sight. Once fairly on the high road, she shouldered her bag, and set to work running as fast as she could. The station was quite close, only about three-quarters of a mile from the house, and she arrived there shortly, in a panting and breathless condition.

“I want a first-class ticket for Liverpool,” she gasped through the pigeon-hole. “Can you tell me when the next train goes?”

"Almost immediately, miss. You're just in the nick of time," replied the man in charge. "There's a special running from town due here in a couple of minutes, which will reach Liverpool soon after the first race."

"Oh! I don't care twopence about the races," she exclaimed impatiently. "I hate them."

The man looked up in astonishment as he handed her her change, but refrained from any further remark. Her cheeks were scarlet, and her whole frame trembling with excitement.

"Is that the train coming now?" she asked, as a distant rumble made itself heard, increasing every second in intensity.

"Yes, miss, and you'd best look alive, for she don't wait a minute."

In a moment more the huge iron locomotive dashed into the station, making the very earth tremble as it passed along. Kate remembered being hoisted up by a porter, hearing the door banged violently to, and the sound of a shrill whistle in her ears, then she found herself whirring onwards through the flat green fields that were familiar to her,

over the brows, and past the villages, and the revolving landscape. Not till some time afterwards did she notice the carriage to be occupied by a lady and two gentlemen, evidently sporting characters, who discussed the previous day's racing eagerly.

"They tell me," said one, "that poor Jack Clinker is awfully hurt."

Kate pricked up her ears and listened in an agony.

"Really?" said his companion. "I'm sorry to hear so."

"Yes, they do say, indeed, that he will never be able to ride again."

She leant forward and said in a polite but trembling voice—

"Can you tell me, please, what is the matter?"

The gentlemen both stared at her. Then seeing she was a good-looking, well-dressed girl, and evidently a lady, replied politely enough in the negative, whereupon she relapsed once more into silence, and flattened her nose against the somewhat dirty window panes.

How interminable the time seemed, to be sure! Jack, Jack, Jack, was the one idea,

the one engrossing and overpowering thought which filled her mind, and before which all others were utterly subservient. Faster, if only they could go faster, every minute was a lifetime, every stoppage an eternity. So terrible did her impatience become that she could scarcely sit still in her seat, and had it not been for the restraining influence of her companions she would have paced to and fro the compartment like a wild beast in a den. Already they evidently viewed her with that distrustful suspicion characteristic of the British nation abroad on its travels, and hid themselves behind their respective newspapers, taking furtive peeps at her when they imagined she was not looking, and which she as invariably detected to their joint discomfiture.

What a relief it was when at length the train steamed into the Liverpool Station, and its human freight quickly dispersed amongst the expectant host of porters, omnibuses, and cabs. The crowd, indeed, was so great that Kate was forced to wait some little time before, thanks to the activity of a friendly official, she succeeded in obtaining a vehicle.

She had never been to Liverpool before, and everything was new and strange to her. She began to feel nervous, but the excitement of the moment bore her up until they arrived at the Adelphi. Hitherto her sole idea had been to reach Jack, to get to him as quickly as possible, but now, when she had paid the cabman and found herself in the midst of bustling waiters, who appeared to have no idea of attending to anybody's business except their own, all of a sudden her heart failed her, and she felt a horrible sense of shyness and isolation stealing over her senses, while all sorts of disagreeable speculations and possibilities, which she had never contemplated before, presented themselves to her mind. What if Jack were in a room full of people? She should die with shame, more especially if he treated her coolly and appeared surprised at the visit; or he might have some of his female relations already in attendance, and that would be worse than anything, for they would stare at her and question her, and laugh at her, and pull her to pieces, and perhaps even take her character away. She began to wish she had taken Mary, or even old Maggie with her; anybody

to lend a little countenance and support. But it was too late to go back now ; and besides, though she counted the costs of her enterprise, the desire to see Jack, and to seek his forgiveness, remained as strong as ever. If only he were pleased, then everything would be right, and she felt she could defy the world ; but supposing he was not, supposing he looked upon her coming as a bore and an intrusion ; supposing, though he had loved her once, he loved her no longer, and, like most of his sex, proved fickle and changeable ; supposing he thought she was making a fool of herself ; and supposing he greeted her as an utter stranger ? Why, then, she declared she would never face any of her old friends again, but hide away in some remote corner where she could try and bear her disgrace as best she might.

Poor Kate ! as she stood in the lobby, racked with doubts and hesitations, her most inveterate enemy could have devised no greater torture than she was enduring at that moment. Love battled against pride, decorum, and propriety ; but love weighed down the scale, love gained the day and made her finally stop a hurrying waiter laden with hot

dishes and ask him the number of Colonel Clinker's room.

"He is here, is he not?" she added, summoning all her courage to her assistance.

"Yes, miss," answered the waiter, pausing for a second in his onward career; "but I am sorry to say as 'ow he met with a hugely haccident yesterday a riding that brute Figaro. I know Colonel Clinker well, and a real nice gentleman he be, to be sure."

"Do you think I could see him for a minute? I have come a very long way on purpose, and don't want to go back disappointed."

The man looked at her critically as if the entry or non-entry to Colonel Clinker's apartment were entirely dependent upon his approbation.

"Some relation, I suppose?" he said curiously.

Kate blushed scarlet at the question.

"Yes," she stammered, scarce knowing what explanation to give. "I—I—am—his—sister."

The waiter honoured her with an incredulous stare.

"Humph!" he muttered *sotto voce*. "Sisters

don't go all of a tremble like that, even when their brothers *do* meet with a haccident. Sweetheart would be a deal nearer the mark."

Fortunately, however, for Kate the little waiter was at that moment deeply in love himself with a fair kitchenmaid who employed her time in peeling potatoes and scraping vegetables, and in consequence sympathised heartily with the romance of others.

"Come this way, miss," he said, "and I'll show you Colonel Clinker's room."

So saying he deposited the silver dishes he was carrying on a side table and ascended a flight of steps, after which he deftly wended his way through a series of labyrinthian passages and finally brought up before a light deal painted door, on which number thirty-four was legibly written in white characters.

"There, that's it, miss," he said, immediately disappearing, and leaving Kate standing on the threshold a prey once more to anxious doubts and self-torturing scruples. "You've nothing to do but turn the 'andle and walk in."

But she found it was easier said than done,

for to turn the handle and walk in was exactly what she could *not* bring herself to do, at least, not all in a hurry and without due preparation. She might have remained there, indeed, indefinitely had not the door suddenly opened from the inside and a gentleman—evidently a doctor—stumbled right up against her to their mutual surprise.

“I beg pardon,” exclaimed he, as soon as he had recovered from the shock of meeting. “Are you waiting to go in, if so, please do not let me remain in your way.”

He made her a low bow, and, almost before she knew what she was about, she found herself in Colonel Clinker’s sitting-room. It was a tolerably large and tolerably cleanly apartment, furnished with the usual red carpet, green fustian chairs and curtains, artificial flowers and wax ornaments, but on the hearth burnt a bright, cheery-looking fire; and before it, with his back to the door, full length on a sofa, lay Colonel Clinker. Kate took all this in at a glance. He did not see her, neither had he heard her entry. He looked very pale, and his brow so evidently contracted by suffering, that all her woman’s

heart went out towards him. She advanced softly and timorously till she was within a few paces, then she stretched out her two arms with a sweet suppliant gesture, and whispered rather than said—"Jack, oh! Jack I am here."

At the sound of her voice he started and looked round hastily. He was no longer insensible! She thanked God for that. The rest seemed easier to bear in comparison.

"You!" he exclaimed, opening the clouded blue-grey eyes wide with astonishment. "What has brought *you* here?"

She had hoped for some other, some warmer greeting than this. The blood mounted to her cheeks, her neck, her brow.

"Are you so much astonished?" she asked.

"Yes. May I enquire to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit, Miss Brewser? It is a great condescension on your part."

"It is no condescension at all. It's only right."

"I fail altogether to understand in what way?"

She was cruelly disappointed at his recep-

tion. This cold categorical manner checked her eloquence, as biting frost checks the rising sap in a young tree.

"I—I—think I'd better go, I am sorry I came," she faltered.

He raised himself on his elbow and looked at her attentively. Some subtle change in her countenance seemed to strike him.

"Don't say that," he answered, struggling hard to retain his self-command. "Tell me instead what you really came for!"

All the barriers of constraint that were closing round her broke down suddenly at the question.

"Jack!" she said, in tones of such beseeching humility that he would not have been mortal could he have remained insensible to them, "you are ill. I came to be—with you." Her voice died away as she finished speaking, and a soft, shy light trembled in her eyes.

He could not believe his senses.

"Good God!" he cried. "Are you mad?"

"No," she retorted with gathering courage. "I am *not* mad; I was mad once when I said that I despised you and that I did not care

for you; but I am perfectly sane now. I know quite well what I am about. Oh! Jack!" throwing herself down on her knees by his side, "you have been blind from the first, but surely now—now that I have stolen away all by myself, without consulting Mary or taking anyone with me, you *must* guess what has brought me here. Does not your own heart tell you the reason, or shall I go on? Well, I have come to you to say that ever since your departure from Foxington my life has been utterly wretched; I have been tormented with self-reproach and the desire to beg your pardon for my wicked words. I will conceal nothing. Jack, till I knew you I cared for nobody, and believed in nobody. I was hard and sceptical. *You* taught me to believe once more in human nature, to believe in man. I had been badly treated once, and I imagined all men alike. You showed me differently. You showed me that honest, true, good men, incapable of a mean thought or action, men who believe in the purity of women, who are chivalrous, and upright and honourable, still exist. And I—I, what return did I make? I—because my pride was wounded by some foolish bet, the explanation

of which was simple enough if only my incredulity had not been so great, I, who am your inferior, who ought to learn of you, look up to and respect you as a superior being—said in a moment of insanity that I despised you. Jack, my darling, my darling. You don't know how I have suffered for my sin. Oh! Jack," and the big eyes grew liquid and the long lashes moist with tears, "have you ever felt what it is to get up morning after morning, day after day, look out drearily on the cold pitiless sky and naked trees, and say to yourself 'There is no chance of my seeing the one being I long to see, of hearing his voice, or watching his movements?' To feel, as the weeks go by, that there is no hope, no prospect of any break or change, and that your life is hateful, devoid of all interest and attraction? Do *you* know, Jack, what it is to rise without joy or spirit, and drag through the long, long weary hours, struggling all the while to do your duty, to appear happy and contented, and not trouble other people with your grievances—and then—to lay your aching head and aching heart on the pillow at night, and wish yourself dead? Wish that instead of a temporary and fleeting rest it

might be for ever and for aye? Do *you* know what it is to try and drown sorrow in amusements that yield no pleasure, in occupation that fatigues, and drudgery that sickens, only to find whenever you are alone by yourself all the old, old thoughts come crowding back with renewed intensity, and that it is impossible ever to forget? Jack, dear Jack, speak to me, look at me, for I have realised such suffering to the full." Passion trembled in the low pleading voice, in the sweet upturned face, and in the dark glistening eyes, passion and entreaty combined.

"I too have suffered," he replied, "and know what it is that you describe."

A light illumined all her countenance.

"You! Oh, Jack! tell me, then, what it is?"

He clasped her hand in his with a solemn fervour.

"It is love, Kate," he answered. "Unsatisfied love, longing and craving for the presence of its object. Do you remember how we stood and said good-bye to each other at the four cross roads leading to Sport Lodge, the first day ever you went out hunting? We little knew then, Kate, what

dear friends we were destined to become! Well, from that moment to this, I have never ceased loving you. You are the only woman who has ever satisfied my aspirations and appealed to my better nature. Kate, dearest," putting his hand to his brow with a gesture of pain, "it does seem hard, doesn't it, that now at length when we understand each other, things should all be so terribly changed? When last I asked you to be my wife, though it might have been considered a piece of presumptuous folly on my part, I had at least health and strength in my favour; now they have gone from me, perhaps for ever."

"Jack, what *do* you mean? For Heaven's sake explain yourself."

"You know I have had a bad fall, Kate. Well, this time they have pretty well done for me."

"But you will get over it, Jack. You will get quite well after a time."

"That's just the question. The doctor says not. Do you know, Kate, that I have lost all power in my lower limbs, and cannot even move a foot?"

"Oh! Jack, you don't say so! How dreadful!"

"Dreadful? Yes it *is* dreadful. You think it dreadful, don't you, Kate? It would be dreadful for your young life to be tied up with a confirmed invalid, and all your days spent in nursing him."

"I did not mean that, Jack, a bit. I meant it was dreadful for you, who are so active and so energetic, and so fond of riding. If it comes to a question of nursing, why, who should nurse you and look after you better than your own wife?"

"Yes, if I had one."

"But you *will* have one, Jack. You are going to have *me*."

He looked at her fondly, with a tender, loving, admiring smile illumining his countenance.

"And do you suppose," he said, "that in my present condition I should be such a brute as to allow any woman to link her fate with mine? If I have to suffer, there is no reason why *you* should too."

"But if I like it, Jack dear? If my selfishness is so great I cannot get on without you?" she pleaded.

"You think so now, Kate. You would not think so a dozen years hence."

"Yes I would," she said stoutly. "I should think so all my life. But tell me, Jack, are you in much pain? Perhaps I ought not to stop."

"No, no, Kate, don't go away. Why it is over two months since I have seen you, and I can't let you run off so soon. Besides," with an attempt at playfulness, "the doctor strongly recommended cheerful society."

"Did he, Jack?" setting herself down by his side again. "What else did he say?"

"Oh! I don't know. He's an old idiot. He does not much like the feeling of numbness; says it comes from the spine, and is the worst symptom of all."

"He's a donkey to say such things," said Kate angrily. "And I daresay he knows no more about it than a twaddling old woman."

"He happens to be the first surgeon in the place, and very highly spoken of."

"I don't care; that's nothing to me. Besides, the cleverest folks make mistakes. Why over and over again medical men declare a case to be perfectly incurable, and the patient ends by laughing all their professional knowledge and fine long Latin names to scorn. *We* mean to do so, don't

we, Jack dear. You and I between us will spite the doctors."

She was trying hard to cheer him up, and induce him to take a more hopeful view of the situation, but even she, smiling as she was through her tears, with her sweet face close to his own, could not succeed in making him deceive himself altogether.

"Kate!" he cried, with a shuddering self-pity cruel to witness in so strong and gallant a man, "fancy if I shall *never* be able to walk about again, never move without crutches, or feel the spring of a good horse under me. It will be little short of living death."

The tears rushed to her eyes, but she brushed them hastily away.

"Nonsense, Jack," she said, "you must not talk in that gloomy fashion."

"I can't help it, Kate dear. Every now and then when I think of what I *was* and what I *am*, the present seems harder than I can bear."

With an infinitely tender and womanly gesture of compassion, she twined her two arms round his neck, and pillowed her head on his shoulder.

"Jack, dear," she whispered, "it is hard. I know it is hard. But you will let me help to bear it, won't you? I will try and be so good, and make up in every way that I can for this cruel trial, and will be hands and feet, and comforter and consoler all in one, if only you say you will let me be your wife? Things might be a little easier to bear if we two were always together! Don't you think so, Jack dear?"

To feel her there close to him, to look down into the loving upturned face and the sweet mournful pleading eyes, was such a trial as wrings a man's soul when he knows that of his own free will he must renounce the proffered treasure, that he must stifle his own passions, and think only of the ultimate good of the woman he loves.

He put her from him gently but resolutely. "Kate, my darling," he said, "you don't know what you ask. It cannot be. It would be wickedness on my part. You are young and can't picture to yourself the future. I *will not* accept this sacrifice. I—who in the long long years to come shall settle down into a peevish, fractious invalid, dragged about from place to place in a Bath chair.

People are apt to lose their tempers under such circumstances, all the vinegar comes out and the honey dries up when one feels one's self reduced to nothing but a manless semi-inanimate lump of flesh ! I love you far too dearly to permit your innocent girlhood to be consecrated at such a shrine, and, as I said before, it would be an unnatural sacrifice."

"Sacrifice!" she echoed scornfully, with the light of a great and holy love shining in her clear eyes. "It is my turn now to appeal to your memory. Don't you remember telling me once that no sacrifice was one where I was concerned ? Well, I answer you back in your own words. Do you think *my* love is so slight, so egotistical and surface-deep as to be deterred by any thought of sacrifice ? Why Jack—I tell you frankly—I would rather tie your shoe-strings, black your boots, be your body-servant or your slave, than marry the finest lord in the land. Jack, since it has come to this I lay aside all reserve, and I ask you, nay implore of you—I, Kate Brewer, to grant my request. All I want and wish is to be with *you*, to live

with *you*, and not to have to leave you alone to your sufferings, both mental and physical!"

The words came easily enough now. Perhaps if he had been well and strong matters might have turned out differently, perhaps he then might have been the wooer and she the wooed. As it was, never was man on this earth more sorely tempted. If his love had not been as pure and great as her own he never could have resisted so long. He desired to act in a way that would prove best for her, not best for him, but her last speech weakened his good resolutions—if indeed good they were—to their very foundations.

"Kate," he said, "they will say, perhaps, that I married you for money."

She laughed an airy joyous laugh which rang through the room, for at last she knew she had prevailed.

"Let them say what they like," she cried. "Who cares? Certainly not you and I, Jack! We know better, and can afford to smile at the world's criticisms. 'Wealth and rank,' can't you hear them saying so? only it so happens in our case they forget the love. And I say, Jack—if Captain Fuller

makes himself disagreeable, just you tell him from me that it is quite true the heiress *was* bowled over, and will be most happy to settle his bet on her wedding day."

"I wish you were not so horribly rich, Kate."

"Now Jack, hold your tongue this minute, unless you mean quarrelling. What are riches given us for except to enjoy life with and relieve other people's necessities when we get the chance?"

"But a man ought not to be indebted to his wife for his fortune."

"Dear me!" she said playfully "Some people are most terribly proud. Nevertheless, so long as between us we have a sufficiency of means, I see no wisdom in going into the vexed question of proprietorship. 'What is mine is thine, and what is thine is mine.' I shall take that pearl pin of yours, and wear it when we go hunting together, Jack, and you can have my little coral horse-shoe instead."

"All right, little woman! You shall do exactly what you please. But I say, Kate, I wish you'd tell me one thing. Did you send me that cheque for £500?"

"Never you mind, sir! It's no business of yours," she said, rubbing her soft round cheek against his like a young kitten.

He had never kissed her all this time, but now he folded her in his arms, and their lips met in one long, loving kiss.

"My darling; my guardian angel! My little wife that is to be," he murmured passionately, closing his eyes in the intoxication of the moment. Heart beat against heart in perfect sympathy and unison. Past and future, merged themselves in the glorious present. Such happiness as Kate's and Jack's was too deep, too firmly rooted for mere superficial words. Love, honour, respect and esteem all combined to render its foundations secure.

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The big ormolu clock on the chimney-piece swung its heavy pendulum to and fro with stately, measured solemnity as it doled out the time—and nothing but its gentle tick-tack, tick-tack disturbed the peaceful silence, while the wintry sun, struggling from behind the grey clouds, gleamed fitfully through the window panes and shed a golden halo round

the lover's heads, as if auguring a life of joyous sympathy and true companionship, such as now and again falls to the lot of a well-mated couple. . . . Time! There was no time for them. The minutes counted for nothing. They were content to remain together, speechless but united.

* * * * *

They never heard the door open or saw Mrs. Forrester enter the room. It took a great deal to startle that lady, but when she perceived Kate Brewster in such close proximity to the gentleman she had come to condole with, she fairly drew back in unfeigned astonishment.

"What is this?" she asked severely—at the first glimpse somewhat mistrustful of the propriety of the situation.

"Nothing very terrible, Mrs. Forrester," answered Jack cheerfully, while Kate hid her blushing face behind her seal-skin muff.

"Humph! I'm afraid I am intruding."

"Not in the least. Pray don't mention it."

"When I heard of your accident," said the old lady with unusual dignity, "I left Fox-

ington immediately, in order to look after you and nurse you, Jack. There's no comfort to be got in an hotel, especially during the race week, and I was in hopes I could have been of some use, but I perceive my mistake, though I must say I feel greatly astonished at finding the premises already occupied by—by Miss Brewser." She evidently laboured under some delusion, and eyed Kate with the utmost suspicion.

Kate was well aware of the fact, as evidenced by the tell-tale colour which dyed her cheeks.

"Yes, Mrs. Forrester," she said stoutly, and before Jack could offer any explanations, for she felt no fears and no doubts now. "By Miss Brewser, the proper person to be at his side. I am quite aware," she continued mischievously, "that apparently you find me here in a somewhat equivocal position. Girls, as a rule, are not supposed to take journeys in order to visit invalid friends. Nevertheless, I travelled here for the express purpose of nursing Colonel Clinker, and asking him to allow me to be his wife."

She could not help laughing at the effect

this latter statement produced. Mrs. Forrester held up her hands in amazement. It certainly sounded a little peculiar, that any young lady should have acted in such an indelicate fashion ; yet she had heard the fact from Kate's own lips—Kate, who scorning all superfluous forms of speech, had gone straight to the point at once and divulged the plain, unvarnished truth.

Mrs. Forrester looked from one to the other incredulously.

"Is this true, Jack ? What am I to believe ?"

"Exactly what Miss Brewster tells you," answered he. "But now listen to my version of the story. I have loved Miss Brewster ever since I first had the pleasure of making her acquaintance, but she chose—perhaps not unnaturally—to imagine that it was her fortune, and not her own sweet self I coveted."

"Jack, don't be foolish !" interrupted Kate.

"I'm *not* foolish !" he replied sturdily. "Well, Mrs. Forrester, she refused me, and I determined on leaving Foxington and going abroad. I thought I should never see her

again, that she did not care two straws about me, and that I should remain a miserable, love-forsaken bachelor all my days. But directly she saw the account of my accident in the newspaper, she came here straight away of her own accord; and now, although the doctor gives me little hope of being able to walk or of getting about in the future, this dear, brave, noble girl declares she loves me better than anyone, and will stick to me through thick and thin, cripple or no cripple."

Many a long year had passed since tears had fallen from Mrs. Forrester's eyes, but now, all of a sudden, they began to twinkle and glisten, till at last, though she winked the lids most vigorously, two great drops rolled silently down her wrinkled, weather-beaten cheeks. She went up to where Kate was standing, and putting her hands on the girl's shoulder with genuine emotion said in a thick, husky voice—

"God bless you, my dear! You are one of the real right sort, and they are very few and far between in this world, but a good heart goes before everything, and that you have got." Then turning to Jack she added

solemnly. "As for you—learn to appreciate her as she deserves, for a true and pure woman is the greatest treasure a man can win, though many of your sex are not capable of understanding that fact." Mrs. Forrester was apparently ashamed of the unusual feeling she had displayed, and at the end of this speech retired behind a huge bird's-eye pocket-handkerchief, from whence she several times blew her nose with great frequency and determination. Common sense, however, soon resumed its wonted ascendancy over her acute mental faculties.

"What do you two precious young people intend doing?" she asked after a somewhat prolonged pause. "You can't stay here billing and cooing for ever."

"I wish we could," returned Jack.

"Oh! no you wouldn't. You'd find when the dinner hour arrived that the pangs of hunger would make themselves felt in spite of all your love. But seriously, you must not be allowed to remain in this hotel longer than can be helped. What you chiefly require, Master Jack, is rest, absolute quiet, good nursing, and perhaps," glancing at Kate with a pleasant smile, "every now and

again, just to keep your spirits up to the mark, a little congenial society. Now all these conditions can be much more easily fulfilled at Foxington than they would be here; therefore, what I propose is this: Kate and I—you must let me call you Kate in future,” turning to the girl—“will get a bed somewhere for to-night, and to-morrow I shall order an invalid carriage, pop you into it, and march you off to my own house. There I can nurse you, and Kate can come and see you just as often as she pleases, and without any fear of that dear, circumspect Mrs. Grundy’s long tongue; while between us I hope we shall set you on your legs again very soon. Eh! Jack, what say you?”

“Why, that thanks to two such excellent friends and comforters, I feel half cured already, and quite a different creature to what I did this morning. It almost makes one become reconciled to having a smash finding out how kind everybody is.”

Then, after some further conversation, the two ladies took their departure, in order to arrange about their sleeping quarters, promising to return directly they had succeeded in finding them, the hotel being already quite full.

"Don't be long," Colonel Clinker called out after them, almost in his own old cheery voice, as they disappeared behind the doorway, and neither were they. They returned in an incredibly short space of time, and then they rang the bell, drew up the table, and ordered such a nice, cosy little dinner, that by the time Mr. McGrath arrived he was astonished to find how wonderfully Jack seemed to have improved since the morning, and in what excellent spirits he appeared.

"Why, Jack, dear old man," he exclaimed, his rotund and good-natured countenance beaming over with satisfaction, "this is astonishing. Gad! but I never expected to find you entertaining ladies in my absence. Sly dog."

Whereupon Jack had to explain to Mr. McGrath the events that had taken place and the relation in which he and Miss Brewser now stood towards each other. Terry shook Kate warmly by the hand.

"Pray accept my congratulations," he said. "I have known Jack ever since I was a big boy and he a small one, at Eton, and a better, kinder, truer hearted fellow never walked the face of this earth. Gad! but

when you refused him, Miss Brewser, I *was* angry. I vowed I never should be civil to you again; but bygones are bygones, and here we are, all of us, I hope, greater friends than ever.

"I hope so, Mr. McGrath," said she smiling. "It will not do for you and I to fall out in the future, else we shall vex Jack, and Jack must be humoured and cared for in every way till he gets quite, quite strong again."

Alas! there seemed but little prospect of that at present, for even as they were speaking, Jack, who had been doing far too much, and worn out by the excitement he had so recently gone through, fell back on his sofa in a dead faint; so that Mrs. Forrester, who immediately constituted herself head nurse insisted on clearing the room, sending them all—even Kate—away, and with the help of the doctor, who called in the nick of time, putting the invalid to bed. Neither did she leave him until he fell sound asleep, calling on Kate in his dreams, and with such a placid, happy smile on his face as told of a truly contented spirit. Then she put the night light within reach and stole softly out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER all, Mary Whitbread's wish was fulfilled

Towards the end of April, when the young leaves burst through their husky sheaths and uncurled themselves in the genial sunshine and gentle dropping showers—when the grass put forth vigorous shoots, which changed the bare fields into one vast emerald, silver-and-gold starred carpet—when the lambs were bleating and the birds singing the white clouds scudding along in the azure sky, and Nature itself rejoicing at the glad-some spring, she and Kate Brewser were married in the grey-walled, ivy-covered church of Foxington. The double wedding took place very quietly, none but the immediate friends and relations of the contracting parties being present, while Captain Fuller and Mr. McGrath acted respectively as best men. Colonel Clinker's health unfortunately still gave rise to grave anxiety. During the weeks preceding his marriage he had consulted several eminent London physicians, without

deriving any marked benefit from their advice, and now on his wedding day it was sad to see him come limping painfully into the church on crutches. He showed a brave face to the world, but both Kate and Mrs. Forrester knew how deeply in his secret heart he fretted at his continued inability to move about with any freedom.

But directly they were married Kate assumed the reins of authority.

"Jack," she said one day to him, "it's not a bit of good going on like this. You don't improve at all. I shall take you to see Wharton Hood."

He protested a little at first, but gave in directly he perceived her heart was set upon the project. And they went. The eminent surgeon, after a careful examination, pronounced one of the smaller vertebræ of the dorsal column to be slightly dislocated, and with some severe manipulation wrenched it into its proper position again, and bade Jack get up and walk.

The latter laughed in his face, but nevertheless, to his astonishment, found himself able to obey. It appeared little short of a miracle.

"Now," said this apparent magician "go your way. Begin by taking gentle exercise, then gradually increase it."

"And shall I be able to ride again?" asked Jack hopefully.

"Ride? Yes, of course you will. Still, if I were you, I should give myself a rest this winter, go abroad, or amuse yourself as best you can," and so saying he bowed the happy, grateful patient, with his attendant wife, politely out of the room.

"Oh! Jack," cried Kate, with the tears starting to her eyes, as they hailed a hansom passing by, "I am so, so happy! I have nothing left to wish for now."

His heart was too full for speech; a great joy and relief being almost as difficult to realise in their first intensity as a great sorrow.

"Jack," she continued softly, "I've got such a splendid plan in my head—a really perfectly glorious idea!"

"What is it, little woman?" he asked, smiling at her enthusiasm.

"Why, *we*," with a saucy loving look, "will make a bolt of it now."

"A bolt of it, Kate? I don't quite understand."

"Don't you, Jack? I'll soon explain. The doctor said you were not to hunt this winter, so we'll go to India instead."

"Oh! so that's your glorious idea, is it, little woman? Why I thought you did not approve of India, were afraid of jungle fever, sunstrokes, snakes, spiders, and all the rest of it."

"So I was, Jack, but I'm not now."

"And what has inspired you with so much valour, eh?"

"You, Jack," she said, nestling close up to him. "I could not bear the idea of your going so far away all by yourself, but now it is quite different."

"Oh, indeed; is it?"

"Yes, altogether; I don't seem to mind it in the least now. I suppose, Jack," she added archly, "that I should not be very, *very* much in your way?"

"Awfully, you audacious little compliment-seeker. I've half a mind if you say any more to leave you behind."

But terrible as was the threat, it failed to

produce the slightest effect. She continued her own train of thought, perfectly serenely.

"Jack," she inquired, "how many rupees a week do you think I should be worth as maid of all work—button sewer, stocking-darner, breeches-patcher, tea-maker, and general tease to the establishment, eh?"

"Why just your weight in gold," he answered, putting a stop to any more such pertinent queries by a kiss, which shocked a virtuous old lady, who, walking down Bond Street in full daylight, was horrified at the depravity and questionable morality of the couple passing by in a hansom.

They remained in town till Ascot Races were over, where, by-the-bye, now that money was no longer of paramount importance Jack had a real good time, and then went to Nevis. There Kate made the acquaintance of Miss Polly Paton, and was surprised to find, directly she heard that that young lady in a fit of despair had fallen back on a tall, raw-boned, red-headed youth of her own nationality, how any animosity she might have entertained faded away in the background, and she could view Miss Polly Paton's charms with complete complacency,

and even banter Jack on the subject. As for Lord Nevis, he fell in love with his daughter-in-law from the first, and they remained fast allies ever after.

And on the still, fine August nights; when the purple hills, melted into a dim, soft haze, and the air was pure and calm, Jack and Kate would stroll out after dinner on the terraced walk in front of the Castle, where, in the field beneath them, they could see Snowflake's white quarters gleaming in the moonlight as he cropped the sweet, crisp grass. Ever and anon he caught a sound of the well-known master's voice as it rose and fell, then he paused, lifted up his noble, shaggy head and gave a low whinny of recognition. The brave hunter's old age is spent peacefully in comfortable and well-earned repose.

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The stars shine out like countless jewels, vieing with each other in point of brilliancy. The big moon, in the pale pure sky, sheds her gentle lustre on the broad ocean, silvering each tiny wavelet as the phosphorescent waters, charged with their burden of minute

insect life, glide from the keel of the P. and O. Company's good boat, "Sea King." All day the thermometer has stood at eighty-two degrees, but now the subtle charm of a tropical evening is upon Jack Clinker and his wife as they pace up and down the deck together enjoying the comparatively cool night air.

"What a jolly world it is to be sure," says Jack, with a sigh of satisfaction, knocking away the ash from his half finished cigar. And though the reflection may not have been couched in terms of great originality, it exactly expresses at that moment the sentiments of husband and wife.

"Yes, Jack," Kate answers seriously, "we ought to be very grateful for all the blessings we have received."

They are fairly started now on their long-talked-of, much-contemplated cruise, and with perfect love and sympathy, hope, youth faith, and health, seem, indeed, as if they had but little left to wish for.

"Are you glad you came, Kate?" asks Jack after a while, during which they gaze at the beautiful scene before them in silence.

"Oh! Jack, how can you ask such a

foolish question? I am always happy and content with you."

The shining stars and pale moon, the soft night air and rippling waters all seem to murmur husband and wife good luck, as they stand side by side on deck at the commencement of their Indian cruise. Dangers are dangers to Kate no longer now that she and Jack are together, and her theories about man have vanished.

And on her lover's arm she leant,
And round her waist she felt it fold,
And far across the hills they went,
In that new world which is the old.

THE END.

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